とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）

鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

電撃文庫

Toaru Majutsu no Index — Volume 1

<< CONTENTS >>

- Illustrations
- Prologue: The Tale of the Illusion Killer Boy. The_Imagine-Breaker.
- Chapter 1: The Magician Lands on the Tower. FAIR,_Occasionally_GIRL.
- Chapter 2: The Illusionist Bestows Demise. The_7th-Egde.
- Chapter 3: The Grimoire Peacefully Smiles. "Forget_me_not."
- Chapter 4: The Exorcist Chooses the End. (N)Ever_Say_Good_bye.
- Epilogue: The Conclusion of the Index of Prohibited Books Girl. Index-Librorum-Prohibitorum.
- Afterword
- Translator's Notes
- Credits

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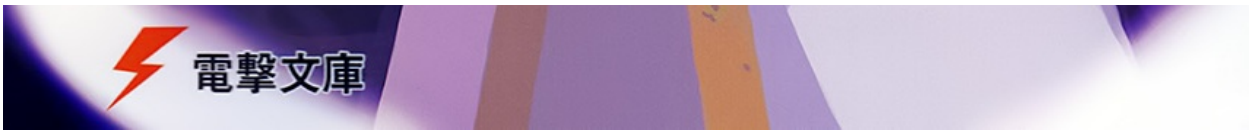

Toaru Majutsu no Index

In my own room, a pure white sister had suddenly come falling from the sky.

"It's not possible..."

Kamijou Touma had muttered, but this young lady with quite an appearance had this to say. "I had escaped from the world of magic and came here."

Here, where "supernatural powers" are recognised as an "ordinary science", in the anti-occult Academy City.

Kamijou doubted the speech and conduct of this mystery young lady who had called herself "Index", when in front of both a "magician" had really appeared!

Thus presenting this anticipated school action story of a newcomer!

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Kamachi Kazuma

A new author hoping to take the most unmotivated author picture in the world. He wants to draw attention by telling the photographer about his stupid hope, turning it into a stare down contest. Ah, perhaps using a psychology book or something to analyze the picture above might be interesting.

(Product of Dengeki Bunko)

Toaru Majutsu no Index

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

Born on September 7, 1973. Loves stupid movies and sweet things. Since he has a gloomy personality, in times where a cheerful picture is needed, he gets distressed since he is not prepared to be cheerful and ends up drawing a gloomy picture.

カバー／あかつきBP

とある魔術の禁書目録

インデックス

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"...I'm hungry."
Mysterious pure white young lady — Index
"Wah..."
High school student of Academy City — Kamijou Touma

"...Ah, it's that Biribiri middle school student again."
"You are to blame because you disgust me!"
Student of Tokiwadai Middle School in Academy City — Misaka Mikoto

"Don't you people wish to help Index out!?"
"You're still continuing with this futile struggle...!?"
Magician — Stiyl Magnus
"That... How can that child be using magic...!?"
Magician — Kanzaki Kaori

contents

10 Prologue — The Tale of the Illusion Killer Boy — The_Imagine-Breaker.

23 Chapter 1 — The Magician Lands in the Town — FAIR,_Occasionally_GIRL.

119 Chapter 2 — The Conjurer Bestows Demise — The_7th-Egde.

189 Chapter 3 — The Grimoire Peacefully Smiles — "Forget_me_not."

235 Chapter 4 — The Retiring Magician Chooses the End — (N)Ever_Say_Good_bye.

280 Epilogue — The Conclusion of the Index of Prohibited Books Girl — Index-Librorum-Prohibitorum.

"Is it O.K.?"

Kamijou Touma's homeroom teacher— **Tsukuyomi Komoe**

Prologue: The Tale of the Illusion Killer Boy.
The_Imagine-Breaker.

“Ahh! Shit! Shit! God damn it! This is just too much misfortune!!”

Even as he realized his cries sounded rather strange, Kamijou Touma showed no sign of stopping his tremendous flight.

As he ran through back alleys late at night, he glanced over his shoulder.

There were eight of them.

He ran frantically all over for almost 2 kilometers, but there were still eight of them. Of course, Kamijou Touma had no way to win in a fight against that many unless he happened to be a former foreign unit’s cook or a cyber ninja that had survived to the present day. In a fight between high school students, anything beyond 1-on-3 was out of the question. That could be called “impossible” even before taking any skill he might have had into account.

Kamijou kicked over a filthy plastic bucket and frightened off a black cat as he continued running.

It was July 19th.

The fault lay in that date. Because summer vacation would start the next day, he was in such high spirits that he grabbed a manga at the bookstore despite a glance at the cover telling him it was no good, entered a family restaurant to treat himself, for once, to a nice between-meals snack, found a middle school-aged girl surrounded by clearly drunk delinquents, and decided that some rescuing was in order.

But, he had not expected more of their comrades to come swarming out of the bathroom.

He had always thought that going to the bathroom in groups was something only girls did.

“I had to run out before the hellish Goya and escargot lasagna I ordered even arrived. I didn’t even get to eat anything, but I’m being treated like a dine-and-dasher. What kind of misfortune is this!? Gyahh!!”

Kamijou scratched his head as he ran out from the back alley and into the moonlit street.

Even if Academy City was as large as a third of Tokyo, he could see nothing but couples no matter where he looked. That was also surely because it was July 19th. It's all July 19th’s fault!, Kamijou, who was single, shouted in his heart. The three blades of the wind turbines located here and there throughout the area glittered in the pale moonlight and the lights of the city nightscape, making them look like the tears of rich bachelors.

Kamijou tore through the couples as he ran through the city.

He ran and glanced down at his right hand. The power that resided there would be of no help in the current situation. It would not let him defeat even a single delinquent, it would not raise his scores on tests, and it would not make him popular with girls.

“Uuh…Such misfortune!”

If he escaped the group of delinquents, they possibly would have used their phones to call in reinforcements and bikes. In order to simply run down their stamina, Kamijou Touma had been letting them catch occasional glimpses of him as bait so that they would continue to run and wear themselves out. It was akin to letting boxers hit you to weaken them.

Kamijou’s goal was only to save any possible victims.

If he could lose them and have them give up without getting into a fistfight, he would win.

Incidentally, Kamijou had confidence in his long distance running. On the other hand, his opponents had damaged their bodies with alcohol, cigarettes and were wearing boots with almost no real functionality. On top of that, running full

speed for long distances without pacing one's self was impossible by its very nature.

As Kamijou alternated and weaved in and out through roads and back alleys while seemingly simply clumsily running about in a panic, he saw one and then another of the delinquents drop out of the chase, leaning forward with their hands on their knees. He felt his plan was the perfect way of resolving the situation without any injuries.

“D-damn it. Why do I have to waste my youth on this stuff!?”

Everywhere he looked, he saw nothing but couples full of dreams and happiness. Unable to stand it, Kamijou Touma felt as if he had somehow ended up on the short end of life. The date need only change and it would be summer vacation and yet he had neither love nor comedy to speak of. It made him feel like quite the loser.

He then heard one of the delinquents shouting from behind him.

“Hey!! You fucking brat! Stop, you master runner!!”

It only angered Kamijou more to receive such a violent love call.

“Shut up! You should be thanking me for not turning around and knocking you and your monkey-level IQ out cold!” Kamijou shouted back despite knowing it was just a waste of stamina.

(He really should thank me for going this far out of my way to keep him from getting injured.)

After another 2 kilometers of sweaty and teary running, he exited the urban area and came to a large river. A large metal bridge spanned the river, about 150 meters across, and no cars could be seen on it. Not lit up, the plain metal bridge was wrapped in an eerie darkness much like a midnight sea.

Kamijou glanced back as he darted across the bridge.

He then stopped: at some point, he had escaped all of his pursuers.

“Sh-shit. Did I finally shake them?”

Kamijou desperately suppressed the urge to sit down right then and there and sighed as he stared up into the night sky.

He had actually managed to resolve everything without having to punch anyone. He wanted to praise himself for that.

“Really now, what are you doing? Do you think protecting those delinquents makes you a good person? Are you some overzealous teacher?”

In an instant, Kamijou’s body froze over.

Because the bridge had no lights, Kamijou had not noticed the girl standing about 5 meters ahead in the direction he had been running, a completely normal middle school girl wearing a gray pleated skirt, a short-sleeved blouse, and a summer sweater. Kamijou stared up into the sky and seriously considered collapsing onto his back. The girl before him was the same one from the family restaurant.

“Wait, so that's why they stopped chasing me?”

“Yeah. They annoyed me, so I roasted them.”

The zapping sound of bluish-white sparks echoed. Rather than a stun gun, as her shoulder-length brown hair swayed, sparks flew from it like an electrode.

The moment a convenience store bag in the wind passed by her head, it was blown away by bluish-white sparks reminiscent of an interception device.

“Ugh,” sighed Kamijou wearily.

July 19th. That was why he had grabbed a manga at the bookstore despite a glance at the cover telling him it was no good, entered a family restaurant to treat himself, for once, to a nice between-meals snack, found a middle school-aged girl surrounded by clearly drunk delinquents, and decided that some rescuing was in order. However, Kamijou had not a single thought about rescuing the girl. Instead, had tried to rescue the boys who had carelessly approached her.

Once again he sighed. The girl was always like that. He had seen her here and there sporadically for almost a month, but they had yet to learn each other’s names. In other words, they were by no means friends.

This time, the girl would arrogantly attack in an attempt to beat her opponent into a pulp and Kamijou would be the one to put up with it. Without a single exception, it went that way and he won every time.

If he actually lost, the girl would likely be satisfied, but Kamijou was a terrible actor. He once tried to fake his defeat and she chased him like a demon for the rest of the night.

"…What did I even do?"

"I cannot allow anyone to be more powerful than me. That is enough of a reason."

That was how it was with her. He felt that even a character in a fighting game would have a more detailed incentive.

"But you're treating me like an idiot, too. I'm a **Level 5**.[a1] Do you really think I would go all out against a powerless **Level 0**?[a2] I do know how to handle the weak."

In that city, the usual standard of a back alley delinquent being the strongest in a fight did not hold up. Those delinquents who could not keep up with the esper powers development **Curriculum**[a3] were the Level 0s, the powerless.

The truly strong in that city, the top-tier students, were espers.

"Yeah, about that, I do understand that you possess a talent that only 1 in 328,571 have. I really do. But if you want to live a long life, you should stop speaking to people so condescendingly."

"Shut up. If you couldn't bend a single spoon after having various crazy things done to you like have drugs injected directly into your blood vessels or have electrodes stabbed in through your ears and into the brain, what could it be but lack of talent?"

"…"

That was indeed the kind of place Academy City was.

The other side of Academy City could be seen in how means of developing the

brain had been calmly added into the Curriculum under the name of “documentation methods” or “memorization methods”.

However, not all of the 2.3 million students living in Academy City had ceased to be human and became something like a manga protagonist.

Just under 60% of the whole population were utterly useless Level 0s who could only bend a spoon after focusing their brain to the point of blood vessel bursts.

“If I need to bend a spoon, I can just use pliers, and if I need fire, I can just buy a cheap lighter. Also, what do I need telepathy for when I have a cell phone? Are esper powers really that great?”

Those were the words of Kamijou who had been branded as useless by Academy City’s physical examination sensors.

“And everyone’s priorities are all messed up. They’re all rejoicing over the byproduct we call esper powers, but isn’t our real objective something beyond that?”

In response, the girl who was one of Academy City’s seven Level 5s twisted the edges of her lips.

“Hahh? …Oh, that. What was it again? Something like, ‘Humans cannot calculate god, so we need to acquire a body that exceeds humanity before we can arrive at god's answer’, right?” The girl gave a haughty laugh. “Hah. Don’t make me laugh. What is all this about the ‘brain of god’? Have you heard about the supposed military Sisters created based on an analysis of my DNA map? It seems to me these lucrative side effects are more important than that objective.”

After saying that, the girl suddenly stopped.

In the silence, it felt as if the quality of the air was changing.

“…For God's sake, those are the words of the strong.”

“Hah?”

“The strong. The strong. The strong. Those are the fearless and cruel words of a manga protagonist who was born with his abilities and does not understand the

pain of arriving there on his own."

The river below the bridge began to make an unsettling amount of noise.

A dark flame could be felt on the grit of her words that hinted at just how much of her humanity she had abandoned to arrive at the position of one of Academy City's seven Level 5s.

Kamijou denied all of it with just a few words. Not even once did he turn around.

He did this by never losing.

"Wait, wait, wait, wait! Take a look at the results of the annual physical examination. I'm a Level 0 and you're a Level 5. Ask anyone you find out on the streets, and they'll tell you who's stronger!"

Academy City's powers development heavily used things such as pharmaceutics, neuroscience, and cerebral physiology. It was a purely scientific endeavor. After undergoing the Curriculum to a certain extent, one could bend a spoon even without talent.

And yet Kamijou Touma could do nothing.

According to Academy City's instruments, he was truly powerless.

"Zero, you say," repeated the girl as if she was turning it over in her mouth. She stuck a hand in her skirt pocket and pulled out an arcade coin. "Have you ever heard the term **Railgun**?"[a4]

"Ahn?"

"The idea behind it is the same as a linear motor train. It is a ship-borne weapon that uses powerful electromagnets to fire a metal projectile."

The girl flicked the coin up into the air with her thumb. The coin rotated a few times before landing back onto her thumb.

"It refers to something like this."

Just as she spoke, an orange spear of light suddenly and silently shot past Kamijou's head. It was more like a laser than a spear. He could only tell it had originated from the girl's thumb because the afterimage of light stretched back to it.

Almost like thunder, the noise rumbled in with a slight delay. As a shockwave tore through the air around his ears, Kamijou's sense of balance was partially destroyed. He staggered and glanced over his shoulder.

The instant the orange light struck the road surface on the bridge, the asphalt was blown away like an airplane making an emergency landing on the ocean. Even after travelling a 30 meter path of utter destruction and stopping, the orange afterglow was still burning the air like an afterimage.

"Even a coin like this can be quite powerful when it's fired at three times the speed of sound. Of course, the coin melts after 50 meters because of air friction."

That bridge made of steel and concrete swayed like an unreliable suspension bridge. Failing metal bolts could be heard occasionally.

"…!!"

Kamijou felt chilled like dry ice was stuffed into his blood vessels.

He felt like all the moisture in his body had been turned to sweat and evaporated.

"Damn you. Don't tell me you used that to drive them away!!"

"Don't be stupid. I match my methods to my opponent. I don't want to accidentally become a murderer." As she spoke, sparks flew from the girl's brown hair like an electrode. "This was enough for those Level 0s!"

Bluish-white sparks flew from the girl's bangs like a horn and a spear-like line of lightning flew towards Kamijou.

There was no way to evade. After all, he was against a bluish-white lightning spear shot from a Level 5's hair. It was an experience like watching a thundercloud fire a bolt at light speed and then trying to dodge it.

An explosive noise followed after a slight delay.

Kamijou immediately held up his right hand to protect his face and the lightning spear struck it. It rampaged through Kamijou’s body and sparks scattered in every direction and into the bridge's steel framework.

…Or so it had seemed.

“So, why are you completely unhurt?”

Her words seemed lighthearted enough, but the girl baring her canines was glaring at Kamijou.

The high voltage current that had scattered into the surroundings had been powerful enough to burn the steel framework of the bridge, yet,

Kamijou’s right hand had not been blown off by the direct hit. …In fact, it lacked even a single burn.

Kamijou’s right hand had erased the girl’s electrical strike that numbered a few hundred million volts.

“Honestly, what's with you? That power of yours isn’t listed in Academy City’s **Bank**.[a5] If I’m a one in 328,571 genius, then you’re a one in 2,300,000 disaster,” the girl muttered in annoyance but Kamijou neglected to give even a single word in response. “If I pick a fight with an exception like that, I might be able to raise my level, don’t you think?"[1]

“…But you always lose.”

He received a response in the form of more lightning that shot from her forehead, well over Mach 1 at that.

However, it scattered in every direction the instant it met Kamijou’s right hand.

It was very much like a water balloon bursting.

Imagine Breaker.[a6]

Esper powers ranged from the ones mocked on TV to the ones established with numerical formulas in Academy City. Anything using that kind of supernatural power, even if it were part of God’s system, would be negated without question

by that supernatural power of his.[2]

As it was supernatural in origin, even that girl's Railgun ability was no exception.

However, Kamijou's Imagine Breaker only worked on the supernatural power itself. Simply, he could negate an esper's fireball, but he was still vulnerable to the concrete shards broken by the fireball. Also, the effective range was only his right hand and wrist. If the fireball hit him anywhere else, he would be burned.

And yet…

(I really, really thought I was going to die there! Kyaahhh!!)

Kamijou Touma's calm and composed expression stiffened awkwardly. Even with a right hand that could completely negate those light-speed lightning spears, it was sheer coincidence that they struck his right hand.

His heart was pounding in his chest as he desperately tried to force a mature smile onto his face.

"I guess you could say that was either some misfortune or you're just unlucky."

That was how Kamijou brought that day, July 19th, to an end.

With just one comment, he seemed to be lamenting everything in the world.

"You just really aren't lucky at all."

Chapter 1: The Magician Lands on the Tower.
FAIR,_Occasionally_GIRL.

Part 1

"You Aquarii born between January 20th and February 18th have the greatest luck in love, work, and money! No matter how incredibly improbable things may get, only good things will happen, so how about you go play the lottery!? But no matter how popular you may be, don't try dating three or four girls at the same time♪."

"...Y'know, I knew it would be something like this, but still."

It was July 20th, the first day of summer vacation.

Kamijou Touma was at a loss for words in his Academy City dorm room that was ruled by a boiling heat due to a broken air conditioner. Apparently, lightning had struck during the night and had taken out 80% of the electrical appliances, meaning that the contents of his fridge had been wiped out. When he tried to eat the cup yakisoba he kept as emergency rations, he had spilled the noodles all over the sink. With no other option, he decided to eat out, but he stepped on and broke his ATM card while searching for his wallet. When he spitefully crawled back into bed to cry himself to sleep, he was woken by a love call on the phone from his homeroom teacher saying, "Kamijou-chan, you're an idiot, so you need supplementary lessons♪"

He had always felt that horoscopes given on TV like weather forecasts tended to be just that, forecasts, but he was unable to laugh it off when it was that false.

"…I really do get it. But I can't fully grasp it without speaking to myself."

The horoscope was perpetually wrong and Kamijou never encountered a true good luck charm. It was simply everyday life for Kamijou Touma. He had believed that his fantastic misfortune ran in the family, but his father had won fourth prize, about 100,000 yen, in a lottery and his mother had won a vending machine roulette again and again without end. At times he wondered whether he was not blood related to them, but he could not enter the "heir to the throne" route without activating the little sister flag, so that kind of pointless foreshadowing would actually be a problem.

To sum it up, Kamijou Touma experienced nothing but misfortune to the extent that his life could in essence be called a running gag.

But he had no intention of just lazing around because of bad luck.

Kamijou did not rely on luck. In other words, he had a lot of drive.

“…Now then. The immediate problems are my card and the fridge.”

Kamijou scratched his head and looked around his room. As long as he had his bankbook, he could get a new card easily enough. The real problem was the fridge… or rather, breakfast. They called it supplementary lessons, but he was sure to be forced to take Methuselin pills and Elbrase powder for the sake of power development. Doing that on an empty stomach would not be a good idea.

As he changed out of the T-shirt he wore instead of pajamas and into his summer uniform, Kamijou considered stopping by a convenience store on the way to school. Living up to his position as an idiotic student, Kamijou had pointlessly stayed up all night as summer break approached, so a grinding pain was running through his sleep-deprived head. However, he forced himself to think positively.

(Well, I guess I’m getting off easy if a single week will wrap up everything I missed in the four months’ worth of class I skipped this term.)

His mood rebounded to the extent that he suddenly muttered, “The weather sure is nice. Maybe I should air out my futon.”

Kamijou then opened the screen door to the balcony, where he expected the futon would be nice and fluffy once he got back from his supplementary lessons.

But on that seventh floor balcony, the wall of the neighboring building was less

than two meters away.

“The sky is so blue, but my future is pitch black♪”

His spirits dropped sharply. Forcing himself to say it cheerfully only had the opposite effect.

Having no one around to act as the straight man only tormented him with a feeling of loneliness and he used both hands to grab the futon on his bed.

(All else fail, I at least have to get this nice and fluffy.)

While thinking, he felt something soft squish under his foot and looked down to find yakisoba bread still in its plastic wrapping. It had been in the aforementioned ruined refrigerator, so it had surely gone bad.

“…I just hope it doesn’t suddenly start raining this evening.”

Voicing a sudden bad premonition he had, Kamijou trudged out the opened screen door and to the balcony.

He spotted a white futon already hanging there.

“?”

Though it was a school dormitory, the layout was exactly like a one-room apartment so Kamijou lived alone. As such, no one besides Kamijou Touma would hang a futon over the railing of his room’s balcony.

When he looked closer, he realized it was not a futon at all, but a girl wearing white clothes.

“Hahh!?”

The real futon fell from his hands.

It was a mystery. In fact, it was nonsensical. As if she had exhaustedly collapsed across a metal rod, the girl had her waist pressed up against the balcony railing and her body bent such that her arms and legs were dangling straight down.

Her age was about 14 or 15. She looked about a year or two younger than

Kamijou. She must have been foreign because her skin was pure white and her hair was as well... No, silver. Her hair was rather long, so it completely covered her upside down head, hiding her face from view. Kamijou guessed it must go down to her waist normally.

Her clothes...

“Wah, it’s a real sister… The nun kind, not the sibling kind.”

Was habit the term for what she wore? It was that outfit you expected to see on a nun in a church. Her clothes looked a bit like a long dress that reached her ankles, and she wore a one-piece hood over her head that was a bit different from a hat. However, while normal nun's habits were jet black, hers was pure white. Was it made of silk? Also, at all the important points of the outfit, embroideries made of golden thread were sown in. Kamijou could not believe just how much the impression given by the same design could change by altering the color scheme. What he saw reminded him of a nouveau riche teacup.

The girl’s lovely fingertips twitched. Her head slowly rose from its hanging position. Her silk-like silver hair smoothly split to either side like a curtain and the girl’s face appeared from between the long, long hair.

(Wah, wah…!)

The girl’s face was relatively cute. Her white skin and green eyes were a new experience for someone with zero overseas experience like Kamijou, and she somehow seemed like a doll to him.

However, that was not what had left Kamijou so flustered.

She was a foreigner and Kamijou Touma’s English teacher had suggested he take up a lifelong policy of avoiding foreigners. If someone from some strange country suddenly started talking on and on to him, he would likely end up buying a down comforter without even realizing it.

“I…”

The girl’s cute but slightly dried lips slowly moved.

Kamijou thoughtlessly took a step or two back. With a squish, he stepped on the

yakisoba bread once more.

“I’m hungry.”

“……”

For an instant, Kamijou thought he was so dim witted that his mind had automatically substituted the foreign language he had heard with Japanese. Similar to how dim elementary school kids would give ridiculous lyrics to songs that they did not know the real lyrics to.

“I’m hungry.”

“……”

“I’m hungry.”

“…”

“How many times do I have to tell you that I’m hungry?”

The silver-haired girl seemed to get a little irate at how Kamijou stood there, frozen.

(No. That settles it. This can’t be anything other than Japanese.)

“Ah, umm…” he said as he stared at the girl draped over the balcony railing. “What? Are you trying to say you collapsed from exhaustion or something?”

“You could also say I have collapsed and am about to die.”

“…”

The girl could speak Japanese really well.

“It would be great if you could feed me enough food to fill me up.”

Kamijou looked down at the squished and likely spoiled yakisoba-pan still in its wrapper at his feet.

He had no idea what was going on, but knew he would be better off not getting

involved. In the hopes of happily sending the girl off to some distant place, he stuck the squished bread up to her mouth. He was sure she would run off once she caught a whiff of the sour smell, so he meant it as something similar to chazuke being offered to a guest one wanted to leave in Kyoto.[3]

“Thank you. And it’s time to eat.”

Her mouth engulfed it along with the wrapping, Kamijou’s arm included.

Once again, Kamijou’s day began with a scream and a taste of misfortune.

Part 2

“I suppose I need to start with an introduction.”

“Actually, I would rather you started explaining why you were hanging there.”

“My name is Index.”

“That's clearly a fake name! What do you mean Index!? What are you, a table of contents!?”

“As you can see, I am from the Church. This is important. Oh, but I’m not from the Vatican. I’m from the Anglican Church.”

“I don’t know what that means and you're just going to ignore my questions!?”

“Hmm, is Index lacking? Well then, my magic name is **Dedicatus545**[a7]—The devout lamb protects the knowledge of the strong.”[4]

“Hello? Hello? Just what kind of alien am I talking to?”

Kamijou did not understand so he dug his finger inside his ear, and Index chewed on her thumbnail. Was that a habit of hers?

Kamijou wondered why they were politely sitting there facing each other from across a glass table like it was a marriage interview.

If he did not leave soon, he would be late for his supplementary lessons, but he could hardly leave this strange person in his room. To make matters worse, the mysterious silver-haired girl calling herself Index seemed to have taken a liking to the room to the point that she seemed willing to laze about on the floor.

Had Kamijou’s misfortune called her here? He whole-heartedly hoped not.

“Anyways, it would be great if you could feed me enough food to fill me up.”

“Why would I do that!? I don’t want to raise your love meter. I’d rather die than activate some weird flag and end up stuck on the Index route!!”

“Um… is that slang? I’m sorry, but I have no idea what you're saying.”

Typical of a foreigner, she had no knowledge of the Japanese otaku culture.

“But if I leave now, I'll collapse three steps out the door.”

"...Don’t give me that collapsing nonsense.”

“I'll gather my last remaining strength to leave a dying message: a picture of you.”

“Wha-?”

“And, if someone happens to save me, I'll tell them I was imprisoned in this room and tormented to the point of collapse. I'll let them know you forced your cosplaying preferences onto me.”

“Don’t you dare say that! So, you do know a thing or two about otaku culture, don’t you!?”

“?”

She tilted her head to the side like a kitten seeing itself in the mirror for the first time.

He regretted letting her get him agitated, feeling like he alone was somehow horribly cheated.

(Okay, let’s do it!)

He noisily headed toward the kitchen. Only spoiled goods were left in the fridge so it would cost nothing to feed her. The boy figured it would be fine if the food were heated. He dumped everything into a frying pan and made something similar to stir-fried vegetables.

(Come to think of it, where did this girl come from?)

Naturally, there were people from out of the country in Academy City. However, she did not have the characteristic “scent” of a resident. Nonetheless, it was also strange for someone to come in from outside.

Academy City was treated like a city made up of hundreds of schools, but it was more accurate to consider it like a city-sized boarding school. It was large enough to cover a third of Tokyo, but was surrounded by something akin to the Great Wall of China; though not as strict as a prison, it was still not a place one could simply wander into.

...Or so it had seemed. In reality, three satellites launched for experiments by a technical college were constantly monitoring the city. Every individual going in or out of the city was completely scanned and if any suspicious person for whom the gate records did not match, either **Anti-Skill**[a8] or **Judgment**[a9] from different schools would immediately intervene.

(But... that zapper of a girl reigned in that thundercloud yesterday. That might have hidden Index from the satellites.)

“So why were you hanging out to dry on my balcony?” Kamijou asked the girl as he put soy sauce on the stir-fried vegetables-like dish he was making with purely ill intentions.

“I wasn’t hanging out to dry.”

“Then what were you doing? Were you blown over and landed there?”

“...Something like that.”

Kamijou meant it as a joke and stopped moving the frying pan as he turned around to face the girl.

“I fell. I was trying to jump from rooftop to rooftop.”

(Rooftop?)

Kamijou looked up at the ceiling.

Cheap student dorms lined the building level and even more of the same types of eight-story buildings were lined up. One glance out the balcony showed a gap of two meters between buildings. It was true that a running jump could get you from one rooftop to another. However...

“But that’s eight stories high? One wrong step and you’d be heading straight to hell.”

“Yes, you don’t even get a grave if you commit suicide,” said Index cryptically. “But I had no choice. I had no other means of escape.”

“Escape?”

Kamijou frowned at that ominous word.

“Yes,” said Index like a child. “I was being chased.”

“...”

Kamijou’s hand shaking the hot frying pan stopped moving once more.

“I made my jump fine, but I was shot in the back in midair.” The girl calling herself Index seemed to smile. “I apologize. It seems I was caught on your balcony as I fell.”

She tossed an innocent smile in Kamijou Touma’s direction without even a hint

of self-deprecation or sarcasm.

“You were shot...?”

“Yes? Oh, you don’t need to worry about a wound. These clothes also function as a defensive barrier.”

What did she mean by a defensive barrier? Was it a bulletproof vest?

The girl spun around as if to show off new clothes and certainly did not seem injured. Kamijou had to wonder whether she really had been shot. The concept that she was delusional or making it up seemed more realistic.

But...

The fact remained that she had indeed been hanging from his seventh story balcony.

If, hypothetically, everything she was saying were true…

Who shot her?

Kamijou deliberated.

He thought about how determined one would have to be to jump between the rooftops of an eight-story building. He also considered how lucky she was to be caught on his seventh-story balcony and the hidden meaning behind the fact that she collapsed.

She said she was being chased.

His final thoughts wondered the meaning of the smile on Index’s face as she said those words.

He knew not what circumstances Index was in and understood not what the few things she told him had meant. Most likely, he could only understand half of it if Index explained everything from start to finish and would still have no idea how to even begin to understand the latter half.

Nonetheless, one truth remained.

With a tightening in his chest, he finally accepted the fact that she had gotten caught on his seventh-story balcony when one wrong step could have sent her straight to the asphalt below.

“Food.”

Index poked her head from behind Kamijou. Despite her Japanese fluency, she must not have had much experience with chopsticks because she held them in a fist like a spoon while she excitedly stared into the frying pan.

Her eyes were like a kitten’s taken from a cardboard box on a rainy day.

“……Ah”

Kamijou put the (former) food into the frying pan to make something like (poisonous) stir-fried vegetables. For some reason, the angel in Kamijou, whom usually came along with the devil Kamijou, was writhing horribly at the sight of the starving girl.

“Ahh! I-I know! If you’re really that hungry, how about we go to a proper family restaurant rather than give you this horrible meal made by a man with leftovers!? We can even get it delivered!”

“I can’t wait that long.”

“...Ah ...kh!”

“And it isn’t horrible. You made this food for me without charging anything. It has to be good.”

For the first time, she gave a shining, nun-like smile.

As pain assaulted Kamijou like his stomach was being wrung like a wet cloth, Index scooped the contents of the frying pan out with her fist-held chopsticks and into her mouth.

Munching.

“See? It’s good.”

“...Oh, is it?”

Chomping.

“It’s nice that you added that sour flavor to me help get my strength back.”

“Geh! It’s sour!?”

Chewing.

“Yeah, but that’s fine. Thanks. You’re like a big brother or something.”

She gave a large grin as she ate with such a pure heart that she had a bean sprout stuck to her cheek.

“...Gh ...Uuwhaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhh!”

With the speed of sound, Kamijou grabbed the frying pan while Index looked incredibly displeased. However, Kamijou swore in his heart that he would be the only one to fall down into hell.

“Are you hungry too?”

“...Hah?”

“If not, I’d rather you let me eat the rest.”

As Kamijou watched Index look at him with slightly upturned eyes while she chewed on the end of her chopsticks,

Kamijou received a divine revelation.

God told him to take responsibility and eat it himself.

This had nothing to do with misfortune; he had completely brought it upon himself.

Part 3

Kamijou Touma stuffed his mouth full of the fried garbage and grinned.

“Mhh,” grunted the girl calling herself Index with a look of complaint on her face as she gnawed on a biscuit. The way she held the small biscuit in both hands made her seem a bit like a squirrel.

“Okay, you said you were being chased. Chased by whom?”

Having returned from his Nirvana, Kamijou once again asked about the biggest issue in her story.

He was not about to follow a girl he had met less than 30 minutes ago down to the depths of hell. However, it was already likely too late for nothing at all to happen.

“So in the end, I have to go with fox’s words,” thought Kamijou, using a personal term for the sake of feigned kindness.

He knew it would likely resolve nothing, but he still desired to comfort himself by feeling that he did *something*.

“Hmm…” she said with a slightly dry throat. “Now who was it? Maybe it was the **Rosicrucians**[a10] or **S∴M∴**[a11], also known as Stella Matutina.[5] I think it was a group like that, but I don’t know their name yet. …They aren’t the type to find meaning in names.”

“They…?” Kamijou asked meekly.

Apparently, she was being chased by a group or organization.

“Yes,” said Index surprisingly calmly. “A magic society.”

……

“Hah? Magic? Hah? What!? That’s crazy!!”

“Eh? Huh? W-Was my Japanese weird there? I mean **magic**. **A magic cabal.**”[6]

“…” Hearing so in English improved nothing. “What? What? Are you talking about some dangerous cult? Like a cult that says not believing in its leader will

result in divine punishment and then proceed to give you LSD and brainwash you? That's bad in more ways than one."

"…Are you making fun of me?"

"…Sorry, I just can't… I can't accept magic. I may know all sorts of esper powers like **Pyrokinesis**[a12] and **Clairvoyance**,[a13] but I just can't accept magic."

"…?"

Index looked confused.

She had likely expected a believer in only science to deny that any kind of strange thing could exist in the world.

However, Kamijou's right hand held a supernatural power.

It was called Imagine Breaker and could negate even the systems of god seen in myths in a single stroke so long as it was a supernatural power beyond the ordinary.

"Esper powers are pretty common here. Anyone's brain can be 'developed' and have the pathways open up by having 'esperin' injected into their veins, electrodes attached to their neck, and certain rhythms played through headphones. It can all be explained scientifically, so it's only natural to accept, right?"

"…I don't really get it."

"It's normal! It's completely normal, utterly normal. Is three times enough!?"

"…Then what about magic? Magic is normal."

Index sulked like someone had insulted her pet cat.

"Umm… Well, take rock-paper-scissors for example. Wait, is rock-paper-scissors known worldwide?"

"…I think it's from Japanese culture, but I do know it."

“Okay, if you played rock-paper-scissors ten times in a row and lost each time, would there be a reason behind that?”

“…Mh.”

“*There wouldn’t, right? But it’s human nature to think there is*,” said Kamijou with little interest. “You’d think there’d be no way you would keep losing like that. You would assume there was some unseen rule, and once you start thinking like that, what happens when you factoring in things like horoscopes?”

“…You mean like, ‘you Cancers are unlucky, so you shouldn’t compete in any competitions’?”

“Right, that’s the occult’s true identity. Luck is just our dreaming for these invisible rules. While reality is just pathetic coincidence, our hearts mistake it as some great inevitability. That’s the **occult**.”[a14]

For a bit, Index frowned like a displeased cat, but then said, “So you didn’t just deny it without giving any thought.”

“Right. *And it’s because I’ve given it such serious thought* that I can see why those musty old stories are no good. I can’t believe in some magician from a picture book. If we could raise the dead with the only cost being a bit of MP, no one would be developing these other powers. I simply can’t believe in the supernatural that has no connection to real science.”

He felt that people only saw esper powers as strange and mysterious because they were ignorant. The fact that those powers could be explained scientifically was common knowledge in that city.

“…But magic exists,” Index said as she pouted.

Most likely, magic was like a pillar supporting her heart, similar to Kamijou’s Imagine Breaker.

“Well, whatever. So, why are they chasing you?”

“Magic exists.”

“…”

“Magic exists!”

It seemed she obstinately wanted him to acquiesce.

“Th-Then what is magic? Can you shoot fire from your hands without undergoing our psychic curriculum? If so, I’d like to see it. I might believe you then.”

“I have no magic power, so I can’t do that.”

“…”

Kamijou felt like he had just met an esper failure that said they could not bend a spoon around a camera because it distracted them.

All the while, a rather complex feeling filled his chest.

He insisted that the occult did not exist and that magic was ridiculous, but he really knew nothing about the Imagine Breaker power that resided in his right hand. How did it work and what was going on that he could not see? Academy City was at the peak of the world’s powers development, but even its **System Scan**[a15] failed to analyze his power. Consequently, he was labeled Level 0.

Also, that power had not appeared later due to a scientific timetable. It had resided in his right hand since birth.

He insisted the occult did not exist and yet he himself was a part of the supernatural that ignored the rules.

Regardless, he refused to accept the ridiculous reasoning that magic could easily exist simply because there were strange things in the world.

“…Magic exists.”

Kamijou sighed.

“Okay. *For argument’s sake*, let’s say that magic exists.”

“*For argument’s sake?*”

“If it does,” continued Kamijou, ignoring her. “Why are they after you? Does it

have something to do with how you're dressed?"

Kamijou was referring to the rather extravagant nun's habit that Index wore, made of pure white silk and golden thread embroideries. In other words, "Is this church related?"

"…It's because I am the Index."

"Hah?"

"They are likely after the 103,000 grimoires that I have."

……

"…Once again, I don't understand at all."

"Why do you seem to lose motivation every time I explain something? Are you the fickle type?"

"Um, let's go back over this. I'm not sure what these mentioned grimoires are, but I imagine it's a book, like a dictionary."

"Yes. The Book of Eibon, the **Lemegeton**,[a16] **Unaussprechlichen Kulten**,[a17] **Cultes des Goules**,[a18] and the Book of the Dead are good examples. The **Necronomicon**[a19] is so famous there are all sorts of imitations and fakes, so it isn't very reliable."

"No, I don't really care about the contents."

He wanted to add that it was "because it's all a bunch of nonsense anyways", but he held his tongue.

He instead asked, "So, where are these 100,000 books?"

He refused to back down on that point, one hundred thousand books were enough to fill an entire library.

"Do you mean you have a key to where they're stored?"

"No." Index shook her head. "I have every single one of the 103,000 grimoires

with me.”

“Hah?” Kamijou frowned. “You aren’t going to say these are books idiots can’t see, are you?”

“You couldn’t see them even if you weren’t an idiot. There’d be no point if anyone could see them.”

Index’s words were so removed from reality that Kamijou felt he was being mocked. He glanced around, but could not see a single musty old book that may have been a grimoire. All he saw scattered on the floor were game magazines, manga, and the summer homework he had tossed into a corner.

“…Wahh.”

He had forced himself to listen up until then, but was at his limit.

He began to wonder whether she had merely imagined being chased. If she had jumped from the eighth story rooftop, slipped on her own, and gotten caught on his balcony all due to a delusion, she was not someone he wanted to involve himself with any longer.

“Believing in esper powers but not in magic makes no sense,” Index said with a pout. “Are those esper powers really all that great? It isn’t right to make fun of people just because you have some kind of special power.”

…

“Well, yeah.” Kamijou gave a small sigh. “I agree. It’s not right. It’s wrong to think of yourself as above others just because you can pull off some little trick.”

Kamijou’s gaze dropped to his right hand.

No fire or lightning would come. It could not cause any beams of light or explosions, and no strange markings were going to appear on his wrist.

However, his right hand could negate all kinds of supernatural powers, disregarding if the power were good or evil or even the systems of God seen in myths.

“Well, for the people who live in this city, the power they have is like a part of their personality, so you should probably be a bit forgiving as far as that goes. In fact, I’m one of those espers, too.”

“Is that so, idiot. Hmph. You can always just bend a spoon with your hand instead of messing around inside your head.”

“…”

“Hmph, hmph. What’s so great about a guy who cast aside his natural shade to color himself artificially? Hmph.”

“…You don’t mind if I shut that mouth of yours along with that ridiculous pride, do you?”

“I-I won’t give in to terrorism. Hmph,” said Index like a displeased cat. “A-anyway, you say you’re an esper, but what can you do?”

“Umm, well, if you put it that way…”

Kamijou was a bit unsure of what to say.

It was not often that Kamijou explained his right hand to others. Also, since it only reacted to supernatural powers, it could not be explained without knowledge of the supernatural or esper powers.

“You see, it’s this right hand of mine. Oh, and in my case, it isn’t doping; I’ve had it from birth.”

“I see.”

“If I touch it with my right hand, any kind of supernatural power will be negated. That goes for A-bomb level fireballs, tactical railguns, or even the systems of God.”

“Eh?”

“Why does your face look like you just saw a good luck miracle stone in some magazine?”

“But… you don’t even know the God’s name, but yet you just said you can negate His miracles.” In surprise, Index dug her pinky into her ear while giving a scornful laugh.

“…Kh. Th-This is really annoying. I kind of hate being made fun of by some kind of fake magical girl who claims magic exists but can’t prove it.”

That muttering of Kamijou Touma’s soul seemed to upset Index.

“I-I’m not a fake! Magic really exists!”

“Then show me something, Halloween girl! You aren’t going to believe my Imagine Breaker until I destroy something with my right hand anyway. C’mon, fantasy head!”

“Fine, I will!” Index threw both her hands above her head in annoyance. “Here! These clothes! They’re the highest quality of defensive barrier called the Walking Church!”

Index spread her arms to show off the teacup-like nun’s habit.

“Walking Church? What? You’re not making any sense! It’s not very nice to keep using these incomprehensible technical terms like Index and defensive barrier, y’know!? Explaining things means to tell them to someone who doesn’t understand in a form simple enough to become understandable. Do you not get that!?”

“Wha-? How dare you say that when you aren’t even making attempts to understand!?” Index swung her arms around in anger. “Fine, seeing is believing, right? Take a knife from the kitchen and stab me in the gut!!”

“Stab you!? Is this going to end up as a news story that says ‘it all started with a pointless argument’ or something?”

“Ah, you don’t believe me.” Index’s shoulders rose and fell as she breathed heavily. “These have the bare minimum of components required to make up a church: so, they are a church in the form of clothes. The way the cloth is woven, the way the threads are sewn, the way the embroideries decorate it… It’s all calculated. A knife won’t even put a scratch on it.”

“Yeah, right. What kind of idiot would just agree to stab you? He’d have to be an unprecedented kind of juvenile criminal.”

“Will you ever stop mocking me? This is an accurate copy of the Shroud of Turin, the cloth worn by the saint that was stabbed by the **Lance of Longinus**, [a20] so its strength is pope-class. I guess you would say it’s something like a nuclear shelter. It turns aside or absorbs any attack, be it physical or magical. I told you I got caught on your balcony after getting shot, right? Well, I would have a giant hole in me if it wasn’t for the Walking Church. Do you understand now?”

(Shut up, idiot.)

Kamijou’s appreciation gauge toward Index rapidly dropped and he stared at her clothes with scorn.

“…Hmm. So if that really is a supernatural power, would it be torn to pieces if I touched it with my right hand?”

“Yes, but only if your power is real. Heh heh heh.”

“Perfect!!” shouted Kamijou as he grabbed Index’s shoulder.

As if he had grabbed a cloud, it strangely felt like the impact was absorbed by a soft sponge.

“Wait… huh?”

Kamijou cooled his head and thought.

What if everything Index was saying was true, as unlikely as that was, and this Walking Church really was sewn together with supernatural power?

Would negating that supernatural power truly rip her clothes to pieces?

“Huuuuuuhhhhh!?”

Kamijou reflexively yelled out at the sudden premonition he had that he was about to suddenly go up a few steps on the stairway to adulthood. But…

…

…

…?

“Ehhhhhhh? ...Huh?”

Nothing happened. Nothing happened at all.

(Oh, jeez, don’t make me worry like that.)

Kamijou just could not stand it.

“See? What was all this about your Imagine Breaker? Nothing at all happened. Heh heh.”

Index put her hands on her hips and puffed her small chest in pride.

But in the next instant, her clothes fell straight down like a gift’s ribbon.

The threads sewing her nun’s habit together had cleanly come apart, turning it all into mere pieces of cloth.

The hat-like, one-piece hood must have been an isolated item, because it alone remained. Having only her head covered made it seem all the more painful.

The girl froze, still with her hands on her hips and her small chest puffed out in pride.

To sum it up, she was completely nude.

Part 4

Apparently, the girl naming herself Index had a habit of biting people when angered.

“Oww… You bit me all over. What are you, a camp mosquito?”

“…”

He received no response.

Index was naked and wrapped in a blanket. She sat with her legs bent back to the sides while attempting, futilely, to return her clothes to their original form by applying safety pins into the pieces of the nun’s habit.

The sound effect 'dohhn' seemed to dominate the room.

It was not that a new Stand user had attacked.[7]

“…Um, princess? This may be presumptuous of me, but I have a button-down shirt and pants you can wear.”

“…”

She stared at him with snake-like eyes.

“…Um, princess?”

(What kind of character is this she’s playing?)

“…What?” she replied when he called out once more.

“I was completely the one at fault there.”

The only response he received was an alarm clock flying at him.

“Ee!” Kamijou shrieked just as a giant pillow was thrown as well.

To make matters ever more ridiculous, a video game system and small radio came his way as well.

“How can you talk to me so normally after something like that!?”

“Ahh, no! It was quite the life-changing event for this old man as well. But that’s youth for you!”

“You’re making fun of me… Uuuuuuuuhhhhhh!!”

“Okay... I’m sorry, I’m sorry! Don’t bite that rented video like a handkerchief, you idiot!”

Kamijou Touma bowed down to the ground with both his hands straight forward

like it was a part of some kind of joke.

Deep down, Kamijou felt like a grip was crushing his heart after having seen a girl naked for the first time.

However, Kamijou Touma was not the type to show it.

…Or so he had thought, but he would have been quite surprised at what he saw had he looked in a mirror.

“Finished.”

While triumphantly blowing air from her nose, Index spread out the pure white nun’s habit that had somehow regained its original form from that hellish do-it-yourself job.

Dozens of safety pins glittered across the nun’s habit.

“……(sweat)”

“Um, are you going to wear that?”

“……(silence)”

“You’re going to wear that iron maiden?”

“……(tears)”

“In Japanese, we call it a bed of needles.”

“…Uuuuuuhhhhhh!!”

“I get it!” Kamijou apologized as he head-butted the floor with all his might.

Meanwhile, Index stared at him like a bullied child and was about to bite through the television’s power cord. Was she a naughty cat?

“I’ll wear it! I’m a nun!!”

Though Kamijou was unsure whether that made sense or not, Index began to change by squirming inside the blanket wrapped around her, much like a

caterpillar. Her head was the only thing visible and was as red as a bomb.

“Ahh, this reminds me of when we had to change at school for swimming.”

“…Why are you looking at me? At least look the other way.”

“What does it matter? Compared to what happened before, just changing isn’t all that arousing.”

“……”

Index suddenly stopped moving, but since Kamijou did not seem to notice, she gave up and started once more inside the blanket. She was so focused on what was going on inside that she did not notice when her hood-like hat slipped off of her head.

The room took an awkward atmosphere like the inside of a silent elevator.

Kamijou’s mind began to flee from reality, but the term “supplementary lessons” floated in.

“Wah! That’s right! I have supplementary lessons!” Kamijou glanced at the clock on his cell phone. “Um… I have to go to school, what are you going to do? If you’re going to stay here, I can give you a key.”

The option of simply kicking her out had disappeared from his mind. Since Index’s nun's habit, the Walking Church, had reacted to Imagine Breaker, she clearly had some connection to the supernatural. That meant that not everything she had been telling him was a lie.

It was possible that she had really fallen from the roof because she was chased by magicians. It was possible that she really would have to continue playing a deadly game of tag.

It was possible that wizards from a picture book or something similarly crazy really were running amok in that city of science where established theories of espers and psychics existed.

And, even if those were false, he did not want to just abandon Index.

“…That’s okay. I’ll leave.”

However, Index stood straight up and made a dramatic announcement. She then slipped past Kamijou’s side like a ghost and showed no sign of noticing that her hood had fallen from her head. But, if he tried to pick it up, it would likely fall to pieces.

“U-umm…”

“Hm? No, it’s not that.” Index turned around. “If I stay, they’ll likely come here. You don’t want your room blown up, do you?”

That smoothly delivered response left him speechless.

As Index slowly exited the front door, Kamijou frantically ran after her. He wanted to do something, so he checked his wallet and found he had only 320 yen left. He ran after Index to give her what little he had, but his small toe struck the door frame at the speed of sound as he tried to exit the front door.

“Bh… myah! Myaahhh!!”

As Kamijou held his foot and let out that strange cry, Index turned around in shock. As Kamijou writhed around in great pain, his cell phone fell from his pocket. The moment he realized it, the LCD screen struck the hard floor and he heard the crack of a fatal blow.

“Uuuuhhhh! S-such misfortune.”

“I’d say that was clumsiness, not misfortune,” said Index with a slight smile. “But if this Imagine Breaker is real, it may be inevitable.”

“…What do you mean?”

“This is related to the world of magic, so I doubt you’ll believe me,” said Index with a giggle. “But if the divine protection of God and the red string of fate actually exist, then wouldn’t your right hand negate all of those?” Index shook her safety pin-covered nun’s habit and added, “The power of this Walking Church was a blessing of God after all.”

“Wait. What we call fortune and misfortune are just matters of probability and

statistics. What you're talking about is completely—…!"

As he said that, Kamijou's finger touched the doorknob and was shocked by static electricity.

"Wha-!?" he cried out as his body twitched reflexively.

The odd way his muscles moved caused a cramp in his right calf.

"~~!!"

The agony left him incapacitated for about 600 seconds.

"……Um, sister?"

"Yes?"

"……Please explain."

"There isn't much to explain," said Index as if it were obvious. "If what you said about your right hand is true, then merely having it is enough to be continually negating the power of fortune."

"……Do you mean what I think you mean?"

"Just by touching the air, your right hand is giving you more and more misfortune♪."

"Gyaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!! S-such misfortuuuuuuuunnnneeeee!!" Kamijou did not believe in the occult, but things that were misfortune related matters were different. At any rate, Kamijou was the type of person for whom any venture he took never ended well. It was to the point that he felt that the entire universe conspired against him.

Meanwhile, a pure white nun gazed upon him with the smile of Virgin Mary. In her eyes was what people called an inviting look.

"Wouldn't the real misfortune be having been born with that power♪?" The smiling nun brought tears to Kamijou's eyes and he finally realized the conversation had gotten off track.

“W-wait, that’s not it! Do you have somewhere to go once you leave? I don’t know what situation you’re in, but you can hide here if those magicians or whatever are nearby.”

“If I stay here, the enemies will come.”

“How can you be sure? If you just stay in my room and don’t draw any attention to yourself, there shouldn’t be a problem.”

“That’s not true.” Index pinched at the chest of her clothes. “This Walking Church functions using magical power. The church seems to call it ‘divine power’, but it’s the same mana. Simply put, the enemy seems to be searching for the magic power in the Walking Church.”

“Why do you wear tracking device clothes!?”

“I told you, its defensive power is pope-class, remember? You’re right hand tore it to pieces, though.”

“…”

“You tore it to pieces, though.”

“I said I was sorry, so don’t look so tearfully. …But, Imagine Breaker destroyed that Walking Church, right? So shouldn’t the tracking device-like functionality be gone too?”

“Even if it were, they’ll know the Walking Church was destroyed. As I said before, its defensive power is pope-class. Simply put, it’s like a fortress. If I were the enemy, I would make an appearance when that fortress was destroyed whatever the reason might be.”

“Wait a second. That’s all the more reason I can’t just let you go. I still don’t believe in the occult, but if someone’s after you, I can’t let you just leave.”

Index stared at him blankly. With just that look, she truly, truly seemed like nothing more than a normal girl.

“…Then, will you follow me to the depths of hell?”

She smiled. It was such a heartbreaking smile that left Kamijou speechless for an instant. Index had used kind words to implicitly say, “Do not come with me.”

“Don’t worry. I’m not alone. If I can escape to the church, they will shelter me.”

“…Hmm. So where is this church?”

“In London.”

“That’s a long ways away! How far are you planning to run!?”

“Hm? Oh, don’t worry. I think there are a few branches in Japan,” She replied as her nun’s habit, which looked like the result of a bullied wife, fluttered.

“A church, hm? There might be one in the city.”

The term “church” brought to mind a giant wedding hall, but the examples in Japan were pretty shabby. First of all, the culture had little to do with Christianity. Also, a country with frequent earthquakes lacked historical buildings. The churches that Kamijou had seen out of train windows had all been small prefabricated buildings with crosses on top. He had a feeling he was mistaken to think that those were nouveau riche churches, though.

“Oh, but it can’t just be any church. It has to be the British rendition I belong to.”

“?”

“Um, there are many kinds of Christianity,” said Index with a bitter smile. “First, there is the distinction between the old style Catholics and the new style Protestants. Also, while I belong to the Catholics, there are various versions of them as well. For example: the Roman Catholic Church centered in the Vatican, the Russian Orthodox Church with its headquarters in Russia, and the Anglican Church with its core at St. George’s Cathedral.”

“…What happens if you accidentally go to the wrong church?”

“They would turn me away,” said Index with the same bitter smile. “The Russian Orthodox Church and the Anglican Church primarily exist within their respective countries. Anglican churches are rare in Japan.”

“…”

Things were looking gloomy.

Was it possible Index had tried going to church after church before she collapsed from hunger? How had she felt as she fled and fled while being turned away at each church she went to?

“Don’t worry. I just have to keep at it until I find a British church.”

“…”

For just an instant, Kamijou thought about the power in his right hand.

“Hey! …If you’re ever in any trouble, you can stop by here again.”

That was all he could say.

He had the power to kill even God and yet that was all he could say.

“Sure. I’ll stop by if I’m hungry.”

Her sunflower-like smile was so perfect that Kamijou could say nothing in response.

Then, a cleaning robot passed by, having gone out of its way to avoid Index.

“Hyah!?”

That perfect smile was blown away in an instant. Index jumped as if she had a cramp in her leg and then tripped backwards. With a horrible sounding thud, her head struck the wall behind her.

“!! S-some weird thing just showed up like it’s nothing!”

Index had tears in her eyes, but completely forgot to even hold the back of her head as she shouted out.

“Don’t point at it and call it weird. It’s just a cleaning robot.”

Kamijou sighed.

Its size and shape were similar to a drum container (large trashcan). It had small tires on the bottom and a circular rotating mop similar to those on a street cleaner. It had cameras in order to avoid people and other obstacles. They were quite hated by girls in miniskirts.

"…I see. I had heard Japan was a leading nation in technology, but I didn't know you had made mechanized **Agathions**."[a21][8]

"Hello?" Kamijou was a bit frightened by how impressed Index seemed. "This is Academy City. You can find those things all over the city."

"Academy City?"

"Yes. It's a city made by buying up the entire western area of Tokyo where development had slowed. The name comes from how it has dozens of universities and hundreds of elementary, middle, and high schools in it." Kamijou sighed. "Eighty percent of the residents are students; all the apartment buildings you see are dorms."

He omitted the fact that it had a hidden face where powers and bodies were developed alongside the studying.

"That's why this city is a bit odd. The city is overflowing with university experiments like the automated disposal of kitchen waste, the wind turbines that function well enough to be practical, and the cleaning robots like this one. Thanks to all that, our level of technological culture is about 20 years ahead of anywhere else."

"Hmm." Index carefully examined the cleaning robot. "So are all the buildings here part of Academy City?"

"Yup. I guess it might be best to leave the city if you're looking for an Anglican church. All the churches here are probably teaching institutions for theology or Jungian psychology."

"Hm."

Index nodded and then finally brought a hand up to the back of her head where she had hit the wall.

“Hyah!? H-huh? My hood is gone!?”

“Oh, you finally noticed? It fell off earlier.”

“Hyah?”

By “earlier”, Kamijou had meant when she was changing in the blanket, but Index seemed to mistake it for when she had tripped backwards in shock because of the cleaning robot. She started looking around on the floor and a question mark appeared over her head.

“Oh, I know! That electric Agathion!”

Still mistaken, she made a dash after the cleaning robot and disappeared around a corner of the hallway.

“…Ahh, what’s going on?”

Kamijou looked past the door to his room where Index’s hood was and then down the passageway. Index was nowhere to be seen. There had been no farewell, tearful or otherwise.

(From the looks of her, I get the feeling she’ll live on even if the world is destroyed.)

He had no proof of it, but that nevertheless was the thought he had.

Part 5

“Okay, I have a handout for you. Follow along while we go through this supplementary lesson.”

Even after spending an entire term in that class, Kamijou still could not believe it.

The homeroom teacher of Year 1 Class 7, Tsukuyomi Komoe, was a ridiculous

teacher who was so short that only her head could be seen when she stood behind her desk.

That little girl teacher was one of the school's seven mysteries: at 135 cm tall, there was a legend saying she was refused a roller coaster ride due to safety concerns and looked to the world like a 12 year old who should be carrying a soprano recorder with a yellow hard hat and a red elementary school backpack.

"I won't stop you from talking amongst yourselves, but you need to listen to what I say. I put a lot of effort into making a quiz, so if you do poorly on it, you will be punished with the See Through lesson."

"Sensei, isn't that where you play poker with a blindfold on!? That's part of the Curriculum for Clairvoyance! I've heard you can't leave until you win 10 times in a row despite not being able to see your cards, so wouldn't we just be stuck here until morning!?" protested Kamijou Touma.

"Oh, but Kamijou-chan, you don't have enough development credits, so you'll be doing the See Through lesson regardless."

"Ugh," Kamijou was at a loss of words when faced with the salesman smile of a salaryman teacher.

"…Mhh. I see. Komoe-chan finds you so cute she just can't help herself, Kami-yan," said the blue-haired, ear-pierced [9] male class representative who was sitting next to Kamijou.

"…Do you sense malice coming from that teacher's back as she enjoyably stretches up to reach the blackboard?"

"What? What's wrong with having such a cute teacher scold you for failing a quiz? Getting physically abused by a little kid like that gets you a ton of experience points, Kami-yan."

"I knew you were a lolicon, but you're a masochist, too!? You really are hopeless!!"

"Ah hah! It's not that I like lolis! It's that I also like lolis!!"

Kamijou almost shouted out "You're omnivorous!?", but he was interrupted.

“You two over there! If you say a single word more, you’ll be stuck with Columbus’ Egg.”

Just as one would expect, Columbus’ Egg involved standing a raw egg upside down on a desk without anything supporting it. Those specializing in Psychokinesis could keep the egg from falling when they worked to the point of the blood vessels in their brain almost bursting. (It was actually an extremely difficult challenge because the egg would break if the Psychokinesis was too powerful.) As with the previous example, you would be stuck there until morning if you could not do it.

Kamijou and Aogami Pierce stared at Tsukuyomi Komoe while forgetting to breathe.

“Okay?”

Her smile was quite frightening.

While Komoe-sensei loved being called “cute”, she became incredibly irate when called “small”.

However, she did not seem to mind being looked down on by the students. Part of it was just something inevitable within Academy City. The city was a veritable Neverland where over 80% of the population was students. The opposition to salaryman teachers was harsh even compared to a normal school, and more importantly, the “strength” of a student was based on both their academic ability and their power.

The teachers were the ones that developed the students, but the teachers themselves had no powers. Some, like the PE teachers and guidance counselors, seemed like they were from foreign units because they trained Level 3 monsters with their own fists. However, it would be cruel to expect that from a chemistry teacher like Komoe.

“…Hey, Kami-yan.”

“What?”

“Would it turn you on to get lectured by Komoe-sensei?”

“I’m not you! Just shut up already, idiot! If we have to play with a raw egg even though we don’t have Psychokinesis, we’ll be spending our entire summer vacation here! If you get it, shut that fake Kansai dialect mouth of yours!”

“Fake… D-D-D-D-D-Don’t call it fake! I’m really from Osaka!”

“Shut up. I know you’re from a rice region. I’m in a bad mood, so don’t make me play the straight man right now.”

“I-I-I’m not from a rice region! Ah. A-ahhh! I sure do love takoyaki.”

“Stop trying to force yourself into the Kansai role! Are you going to bring takoyaki for lunch just to fill this role?”

“What are you talking about? It’s not like someone from Osaka eats only takoyaki, right?”

“…”

“Right? I think that’s right… no, wait. But… but yeah… but, huh? Which is it?”

“You’re falling out of character, Mr. Fake Kansai,” said Kamijou before sighing and looking out the window.

He felt like he should be by Index’s side rather than dealing with that pointless supplementary lesson.

The Walking Church nun’s habit she wore had indeed reacted to Kamijou’s right hand, although, “reacted” was perhaps an understatement. But, that did not mean he had to believe. Most likely, the majority of what Index had said was a lie, and even if it were not, she may have just mistaken some natural phenomenon as the occult.

Even so…

(I guess the fish that gets away always seems huge.)

Kamijou sighed again. If the alternative was being stuck at a desk in that sauna-like classroom with no air conditioning, charging into a fantasy of swords and magic may have been better. And he even had a cute, though difficult to say

beautiful, heroine to go with it.

"…"

Kamijou recalled the hood Index had forgotten in his room.

In the end, he had not returned it. *He did not see it as having been unable to return it*. Even if Index had disappeared, he would likely have found her if he had seriously started looking for her. And even if he had not, he could still go out and run around the city looking for her with the hood in one hand.

When he thought about it, he realized he had wanted some kind of connection. He had felt that she might come back to get it someday.

Because, that white girl had shown him such a perfect smile…

He felt like she would disappear like an illusion if he did not leave some kind of connection.

He was afraid.

(…Oh, so that's it.)

After going through those somewhat poetic thoughts, Kamijou finally realized something. When it came down to it, he did not hate the girl who was caught on his balcony. He had liked her enough that the thought of never seeing her again left him with a slight twinge of regret.

"…Ah, damn it."

He clicked his tongue. With how heavily she weighed on his mind, he wished he had stopped her from leaving.

(Come to think of it, what was it with those 103,000 grimoires that she mentioned?)

Index had said that the group, a magic cabal (something like a corporation?), after her seemed to be pursuing her because they wanted those 103,000 grimoires. And apparently, Index had been fleeing with those 103,000 grimoires in her possession.

It was neither a key nor a map to the place where all those books were stored.

When Kamijou had asked where all those books were, she had simply said, “Right here.” However, as far as Kamijou could see, she did not have a single book. Even if she did, Kamijou’s room was not large enough to house 100,000 books.

“…What was that all about?”

Kamijou tilted his head to the side in puzzlement. Since Index’s Walking Church had reacted to Imagine Breaker, her words were not complete delusion. However…

“Sensei? Kamijou-kun’s staring out the window to look at the girls’ tennis team’s fluttery skirts.”

Aogami Pierce’s forced Kansai dialect sent Kamijou’s focus in an about-face to the classroom.

“…”

Komoe-sensei fell silent.

She had seemed to go through shock because 'that' Kamijou Touma-kun had not been focused on the lesson. She had the look of a 12 year old who had just found out the truth about Santa Claus.

Just as that thought reached his mind, Kamijou Touma was pierced by the hostile gazes of his classmates who wished to protect the human rights of that “child”.

● ● ●

While it was called a supplementary lesson, they had been stuck there until the time when all students were supposed to have left school.

“…Such misfortune,” Kamijou muttered as he gazed at a wind turbine’s three propellers glittering in the sunset.

Any kind of nightlife was forbidden, so the last bus and train in Academy City were set to leave once the students were out of school.

Kamijou missed the last bus, so he was trudging along through the scorching shopping district that seemed to go on forever. A security robot passed by him as he did. It was also a drum on wheels and it functioned as something like a walking security camera. They were originally improved versions of robotic dogs, but children would gather around them and block their way. For that simple reason, the work robots were converted into drum container shapes.

“Ah, there you are, you bastard! Wait up… wait! You! I’m talking to you! Stop!!”

The summer heat had done Kamijou in and he just stared at the slowly moving security robot. He thought about how Index had run off after a cleaning robot and, finally, realized that a voice was calling him.

He turned around to figure out what was going on.

She was a middle school-aged girl with shoulder-length brown hair that glowed a flame-red in the sunset but her face was dyed even redder. She wore a gray pleated skirt, a short sleeve blouse, and a summer sweater… At that point, he suddenly realized who she was.

"…Oh, it's you again, Biri Biri[10] middle schooler."

"Don't call me Biri Biri! I have a name! It's Misaka Mikoto! Why don't you learn it already!? You've been calling me Biri Biri since we first met!"

(Since we first met…?) Kamijou thought back. (Oh, right.)

When they first met, she had been surrounded by delinquents just like the other day. As the children approached her, he had thought that they were after her wallet and stepped forward in an Urashima Tarou-esque move.

However, for some reason, the girl was the one that became irritated, saying, "Shut up! Don't get in the way of other people's fights! Biri Biri!" Kamijou had of course blocked her Biri Biri with his right hand and she had responded with, "Huh? Why didn't that work? Then what about this? Huh?" One thing had led to another, and things had ended up in their current relationship.

"…Huh? What? I'm not sad, so why am I crying, mom?"

"What's with the distant look in your eyes?"

Kamijou was exhausted from the supplementary lesson and he decided not to give much thought in how to deal with the Biri Biri girl.

"The girl staring at Kamijou's face with a stunned expression is the Railgun girl from yesterday. She's so frustrated over losing a single fight that she has come back to Kamijou again and again to challenge him to rematches."

"…Who's that explanation for?"

"She's strong-willed and hates to lose, but is actually quite a lonely person and is in charge of taking care of the class pet."

"Don't tack strange things to the setting!!"

The girl, Misaka Mikoto, flailed her arms around and all focus on the street was drawn to her. It was not all that surprising, the completely normal summer uniform she wore was the uniform of Tokiwadai Middle School, one of the 5 most prestigious and elite schools in Academy City. For some reason, the explosively refined girls from Tokiwadai seemed to stand apart even in a station at rush hour, and it would strike anyone as odd to see one sitting on the floor of a train messing around with her cell phone like any other person.

“So what do you want, Biri Biri? Actually, why are you wearing your uniform during summer vacation? Do you have supplementary lessons?”

“Gh… Sh-Shut up.”

“Were you worried about the class bunny?”

“I told you to stop with the animal stuff! Also, today I’m going to make you twitch like frog legs with electrodes attached! So, get your will and inheritance in order!”

“I don’t think so.”

“Why not!?”

“Because, I’m not in charge of my class’ pet.”

“Why you… Quit making fun of me!!”

The middle school girl stomped down on the tiles of the path.

At that exact moment, a tremendous noise came from the cell phones of the people walking along the area. Additionally, the cable broadcast in the shopping district cut out and a horrible noise came from the security robot.

The crackling sound of static electricity came from the middle school girl’s hair. That Level 5 girl, who used a Railgun with nothing but her own body, smiled such that her canines were bared like a beast’s.

“Hmph. How was that? Did that change your cowardly mind? …Mgh!”

In a frantic attempt to cover her mouth, Kamijou’s hand covered Misaka

Mikoto’s entire composed face.

(Sh-Shut up. Please just shut your mouth! Everyone’s cell phones were fried and they’re looking none too pleased!! If they find out it was us, they’ll make us pay, and I have no idea how much that cable broadcast costs!!)

Due to his recent encounter with that silver-haired nun girl, Kamijou prayed with all his might to the God whom Kamijou normally only thought of around Christmas.

His prayers must have made their way to heaven, because no one approached Kamijou and Mikoto.

(Thank goodness.)

Kamijou gave a sigh of relief… as he continued to suffocate Mikoto.

“Message, message. Error No. 100231-YF. Offensive electromagnetic waves in violation of radio laws detected. System malfunction detected. As this is possible cyber terrorism, avoid using electronics.”

Imagine Breaker and Railgun hesitantly turned around.

A drum container was on its side on the footpath spewing smoke as it spoke to itself nonsensically.

In the next instant, the security robot began sounding a high-pitched alarm.

Naturally, they ran away.

They entered a back alley, kicked over a dirty plastic bucket, and scared off a black cat as they continued running.

(Come to think of it, I didn’t do anything wrong. Why am I running away with her?)

Even while thinking that, he kept running. After all, he had heard on a talk show that those security robots cost 1.2 million yen each.

“Uuhh… S-Such misfortune. Why do I always get caught up in things related to *her*?”

“What do you mean by that!? And, my name is Misaka Mikoto!”

The two finally come to a stop in a back, back, back alley. One of the lined-up buildings must have been demolished because a rectangular area opened up there. It seemed a good place for street basketball.

“Shut up, Biri Biri! You’re the one that destroyed all of my electronics with that lightning yesterday! What could you possibly want after that!?”

“It’s your fault for pissing me off!”

“I don’t even understand what’s got you so mad! I’ve haven’t laid a finger on you!”

Following that exchange, Mikoto attacked Kamijou with her full arsenal, but Kamijou negated the whole with his right hand. This time, her attacks did not end with Railgun. Her offenses ranged from twisting together collected iron sand to create a whip-like sword of steel, to sending powerful electromagnetic waves to mess with internal organs, to even finishing with a blast of real lightning from the sky.

But, none were a match for Kamijou Touma.

As long as it was supernatural, Kamijou Touma could negate it.

“You just keep coming at me and wearing yourself out! Don’t use your powers too much and then blame me when you don’t have the stamina to keep going, Biri Biri!”

“~~!!” Mikoto began to grind her back teeth. “Th-That didn’t count. It can’t count! You never attacked me so it’s a draw!!”

“Sigh… Fine, fine. It’s your win. Punching you isn’t going to fix my air conditioner.”

“Gah…! W-Wait a second! Take this seriously!!” shouted Mikoto as she flailed her arm.

Kamijou sighed.

“*Are you sure you want me to take this seriously?*”

“Ah…” Mikoto trailed off.

Kamijou lightly clenched his right fist and opened it again. A cold sweat began to pour from Misaka Mikoto’s entire body with his simple actions. She froze in place, unable to even take a step backwards.

Mikoto did not know what Kamijou’s power truly was, so to her, Kamijou was truly an unknown horror that sealed all of her trumps without breaking a sweat.

It was unsurprising. Kamijou Touma had challenged Misaka Mikoto’s attacks for over two hours straight without receiving a scratch. It was only natural for her to wonder what would happen if he were serious.

Kamijou sighed and averted his gaze.

As if the strings holding her in place had snapped, Mikoto finally staggered a few steps back.

“…What can I call this other than misfortune?” Kamijou was shocked at how frightened she was. “First my room’s electronics were done in, then a self-proclaimed magician in the morning, and now this Biri Biri esper in the evening.”

“Magician…? What?”

“…” Kamijou thought for a moment. “Yeah… That’s what I want to know.”

Normally, Mikoto would have likely shouted, “Are you making fun of me!? Is your head as messed up as that power!?” and then Biri Biri’d. However, she could only jump in fright that day whenever he gave her a look.

It was only a bluff to fool her, but the effectiveness caused him regret.

(What was all that magician nonsense, anyway?)

Kamijou was reminded of what had happened that morning. The white nun had

used the word readily enough, but now that he thought back, the term was definitely one removed from reality.

(I wonder why it didn't feel out place with Index around.)

Had there been some mysterious something that made magic seem more believable?

"...Wait, what am I thinking?" muttered Kamijou while completely ignoring the Biri Biri girl named Misaka Mikoto who was fearfully trembling like a puppy.

He cut his ties with Index and whatever world she lived in. The world was a large place and it was unlikely he would run into her again in a meaningless coincidence. Thinking about magicians was entirely pointless.

Despite that, he was unable to force the thought out of his mind.

He still had the pure white hood she had forgotten in his room.

That one remaining connection continued to irritatingly prick at the edges of his mind.

Not even Kamijou Touma knew why he was thinking about it so much.

After all, he had the power to kill even God.

Part 6

Those days, one could not buy even a large gyudon with only 320 yen.

"……Regular, hm?"

The girls who happily ate a bento the size of a light novel would likely not understand, but a sweating, growing boy saw the regular size as nothing more than a snack.

After driving off the Biri Biri girl, Kamijou went to a gyudon restaurant to eat his “snack”. With only 30 yen remaining (tax included), he approached his dorm building with the sun having already set.

The place seemed deserted.

It was the first day of summer vacation, and so most people were presumably out enjoying themselves.

The building looked like stereotypical one-room apartment housing. Pathways along one wall of the rectangular building had doors lined up. It being a male dorm, the metal railing lacked plastic sheets to prevent peering up at girls’ skirts.

The front doors, and the balconies on the opposite sides of them, were built on the sides of the building going inwards as seen from the road. In other words, they were in the gaps between buildings.

The entrance to the building was auto-locking, but the distance between buildings was only two meters. One could easily sneak in by jumping from roof to roof as Index had done that morning.

Kamijou went through the auto-locking entrance, passed by the *storage room known as the dorm manager’s room* and got on the elevator. It was out of enjoyable spite that the elevator was dirtier and more cramped than a factory elevator for bringing goods in, but the “R” button, indicating the roof, was sealed via a small metal plate in order to prevent Romeos and Juliets from heading up to the rooftop night after night.

With a microwave oven-like ding, the elevator stopped at the seventh floor.

Kamijou pushed aside the door that clanked as it opened and exited into the passageway. He was on the seventh floor, but there was no wind and it seemed even hotter and stuffier than before because of the neighboring building being so close.

“Hm?”

Kamijou finally realized something. Down the straight passageway and right in front of his door, three cleaning robots were gathered. Seeing three of them was rare. For one thing, he was nearly sure only five were ever deployed for that

dorm.

From the way they were trembling and moving back and forth, they seemed to be cleaning up quite the horrible mess. For some reason, Kamijou had an intense feeling of impending misfortune.

Drum robots had enough power to cleanly rip up gum stuck to the floor. So, what was giving three of them such trouble?

Kamijou shuddered at the thought that his neighbor Tsuchimikado Motoharu might have gotten drunk while acting like a delinquent in order to lose his virginity and had ended up vomiting in tremendous quantity, all the while using Kamijou's door instead of a telephone pole.

"What happened…?"

People had an unfortunate tendency to want to see horrible things.

After taking a few more subconscious steps forward, he finally saw it.

The mysterious girl named Index had collapsed from hunger.

"……Ahh."

She was not entirely visible because of the robots, but someone wearing a white nun's habit covered in glittering safety pins was clearly collapsed face down.

Though the three drums were continuously ramming into her, Index was not moving. It made her seem all the more pitiful, like she was being pecked at by city crows. For one, the cleaning robots were made to avoid people and other obstacles. Why did the machines fail to register her as human?

"…I guess this is misfortune, too."

Had Kamijou Touma seen his face in a mirror at the time, he would have been surprised to see a smile on his face. Deep down he was worried. Perhaps he did not believe her about the magicians, but it was possible some cult was chasing the girl.

He was glad to see her in her usual, starved state.

And even ignoring those worries, he was simply glad to see her again.

Kamijou then remembered the one thing she had forgotten: the pure white hood he had not given back to her. He found it strange that he saw that hood like some kind of charm.

“Hey! What are you doing here?”

He called out to her and ran over.

(Why does just going over there make me feel like an elementary school kid who can’t sleep the night before a trip? Why does each step I take forward make me feel like I’m headed to the store on the release date of a major RPG?)

Index had yet to notice him.

Kamijou Touma forced down a smile at how “Index-like” that was.

And then, he finally noticed that Index was lying in a pool of blood.

“…Ah…?”

The first thing he felt was confusion, not shock.

He was unable to see it previously because of the group of cleaning robots in the way. As she lay face down, he could see a single horizontal line near the bottom of her back. The wound was from a blade, but was so straight it looked like someone had used a ruler and a box cutter. The end of her waist-length silver hair had been cleanly cut off and that silver hair was dyed red by the liquid flowing from the wound.

For an instant, Kamijou failed to comprehend that it was human blood.

The difference in reality between the instant before and the instant after sent his thoughts into chaos. Red… red… ketchup? Did Index use her last strength to suck up ketchup just before she collapsed from hunger? With that pleasant image in his mind, Kamijou almost smiled.

He almost smiled, but he did not.

There was no way he could.

The three cleaning robots continued to move back and forth while making a clanking noise. They were cleaning the stain on the floor. They were cleaning the red substance spreading across the floor. They were cleaning the red substance flowing from Index's body, like digging at a wound with a dirty rag: they were sucking out the blood inside Index's body.

"St…op. Stop! Shit!!"

Kamijou's eyes finally focused into reality. He frantically grabbed at the cleaning robots gathered around the seriously injured Index. He failed to do so because the robots were made necessarily heavy to prevent theft on top of relatively high horsepower.

In reality, the cleaning robots were only cleaning the continuously spreading stain on the floor and never actually touched Index's wound. Even so, Kamijou saw them as bugs swarming a festering wound.

He was having difficulty moving aside even one of those heavy and powerful robots, much less three. While his focus was on one of them, the other two would head for the stain.

He was supposed to have the power to kill even God.

But, he was unable to move those toys out of the way.

Index said nothing.

Her pale purple lips were so still he was unsure whether she was breathing.

"Shit, shit!!" Kamijou shouted out in confusion. "What happened? What the hell happened!? God damn it! Who the hell did this to you!?"

"Hm? That would be us magicians."

A voice sounded from behind him, one that did not belong to Index.

Kamijou spun his entire body around as if meaning to rush in and punch the person. A man was standing there who had come from the… no, not from the

elevator. It seemed he arrived from the emergency staircase next to the elevator.

The white man was over two meters tall, but his face seemed younger than Kamijou’s.

His age was… likely 14 or 15, similar to Index's age. His great height was characteristic of foreigners, while his clothes were… a pure black version of the habits worn by church priests. However, it was unlikely you would find anyone who would call that man a priest even if you searched all over the world.

It may have been because he was standing upwind, but Kamijou could smell the horribly sweet perfume on him even though he was over 15 meters away. His shoulder-length blond hair had been dyed red like the sunset, silver rings glittered on all ten of his fingers like brass knuckles, poisonous earrings hung on his ears, a cell phone strap could be seen sticking out of his pocket, a lit cigarette moved at the edge of his mouth, and, as if to complete the image, he had a barcode-like tattoo underneath his right eye.

One could not call him a priest and yet, neither could one call him a delinquent.

In the passageway, the air around the man was clearly strange.

It was as if the area were being ruled by completely different rules than the ones that Kamijou had been accustomed to at that point. That strange feeling spread throughout the area like icy tentacles.

What Kamijou felt first was neither fear nor anger…

…But confusion and unease. It was a desperate loneliness akin to having his wallet stolen in a foreign country with an unfamiliar language. The icy, tentacle-like feeling crept into his body and froze his heart. It was then that Kamijou realized something:

This is a magician.

This has become a different world where strange things like magicians exist.

He could tell at first glance.

He still did not believe in magicians…

But, he could tell that this was definitely a resident of a place that existed beyond the world he lived.

“Hm? Hm… hm… hm. She got her pretty good.” The magician looked around and the cigarette in the corner of his mouth waggled as he spoke. “I heard Kanzaki sliced her, but this is… I thought there wasn’t anything to worry about because there was no blood trail…”

The magician looked at the cleaning robots gathered behind Kamijou Touma.

Most likely, Index had been “sliced” elsewhere and had barely escaped there with her life before collapsing. She surely had left fresh blood as she went, but the cleaning robots had cleaned it all away.

“But… why?”

“Hm? You mean why she came back here? Who knows? Maybe she forgot something. Come to think of it, she had her hood when I shot her yesterday. Did she lose it somewhere?”

The magician standing in front of Kamijou had used the phrase “came back”.

In other words, he had been following Index’s actions all day. And he knew that she had lost the hood to her Walking Church nun’s habit.

Index had said something about the magicians searching for the magic power of her Walking Church.

That meant the magicians had been following Index by detecting the supernatural power in her Walking Church. They would have known the Walking Church was destroyed when the “signal” cut out… Index had mentioned that too.

But then, Index had to have known.

She had known, but she still seemed to have relied on the defensive powers of the Walking Church.

But why did she return? Why did she need to recover a portion of the destroyed and therefore useless Walking Church? Kamijou’s right hand had rendered the entire Walking Church useless so there was little point in recovering the hood.

—Then will you follow me to the depths of hell?

Suddenly, it all clicked.

Kamijou remembered; he had never touched the hood of the Walking Church that was left in his room. In other words, the hood still had magic power. She must have thought the magicians might detect it and headed there to retrieve it.

And so, Index had braved the danger and “came back”.

“…You idiot.”

There had been no need to do that. It was Kamijou’s clumsiness that had destroyed her Walking Church, and he had realized she had left her hood in his room yet left it there. And more importantly, Index lacked any obligation, duty, or right to protect Kamijou.

Even so, she could not help heading back.

Kamijou Touma was a complete stranger that she had met less than half an hour before.

She could not help but risk her life and return to prevent him from getting involved in a magician’s fight.

“You idiot!!”

Index’s unmoving back irritated him for some odd reason.

Before, Index had told Kamijou that his misfortune was due to his right hand.

Apparently, his right hand was subconsciously negating even the faint supernatural powers that were things like the divine protection of God and the red string of fate.

Also, had Kamijou not carelessly touched her and destroyed her Walking Church nun’s habit, there would have been no need to return.

(No. Those kinds of excuses don’t matter.)

His right hand and the destruction of her Walking Church were not the reason she had felt the need to return.

Had Kamijou not wished for that one connection… Had he only returned her fallen hood that instant…

“Hm? Hm… hm… hm? C’mon, I can’t have you looking at me like that.” The cigarette in the corner of the magician’s mouth moved as he spoke. “It wasn’t me that sliced her and I doubt Kanzaki meant to turn this into something bloody. The Walking Church is supposed to be an absolute defense, after all. Really, she shouldn’t have been injured at all by that. …Honestly, what twist of fate led that to be destroyed? Unless St. George’s Dragon has come again, I don’t see how a pope-class barrier could be broken.”

That last bit was spoken to his self and his smile disappeared as he said it.

However, this lasted only an instant. The cigarette in the corner of his mouth twitched back up as if he had suddenly remembered to smile.

“Why?” Kamijou asked despite not expecting an answer. “Why? I don’t believe in the magic from fairy tales and I don’t really understand magicians or whatever you are. But aren’t there good and evil types of you? Aren’t there magicians that protect things and people?”

He knew very well that he had no right to be moralistic.

When Index had left, Kamijou Touma had let her go and returned to his normal life.

Yet he could not resist saying the words.

“You ganged up on this little girl, chased her all over the place, and then injured her this badly. Can you really say that you’re justice with this reality staring you in the face!?”

“Like I said, Kanzaki did this, not me.” The magician paused for a second. Kamijou’s words had not hit home with him in the slightest. “And whether she’s injured or not, we have to retrieve her.”

“Retrieve her?”

Kamijou did not understand what the magician meant.

“Hm? Oh, I see. You knew the word magician, so I assumed you were completely filled-in. I guess she was afraid of getting you involved.” The magician exhaled cigarette smoke. “Yeah, we need to retrieve her. Technically, it isn’t her we need to retrieve though; it’s the 103,000 grimoires she has.”

…There were those 103,000 grimoires again.

“I see, I see. This country isn’t very religious, so I guess you don’t understand,” said the magician in a bored sounding voice despite the fact that he was smiling. “The **Index Librorum Prohibitorum**[a22] is a list created by the Church of all the evil books that will sully your soul just by reading them. Even if you were to announce that these dangerous books existed, people could still unknowingly acquire one, despite the fact that they don’t know its title. Thus, she has become something of a crucible of poisonous books with 103,000 such books. Oh, but be careful. Reading just one of the books she has would make a vegetable out of someone from an irreligious nation like this.”

Disregarding his words, Index owned not a single book. The lines of her body were clearly visible in that habit and would be obvious if she were to hide any books under her clothes. No need to even mention that not a single person could walk around carrying 100,000 texts, an entire library’s worth of books.

“D-Don’t be ridiculous! Just where exactly are these books!?”

“Oh, they’re there, in her memory,” the magician said as if it were obvious fact. “Do you know what an **eidetic memory** is? It seems to be the ability to memorize anything you see in an instant and never forget even a single sentence or letter. Simply put, it makes you a human scanner.”[11] The magician smiled disinterestedly. “It has nothing to do with our occult or your science fiction. It’s a natural condition. She has been to the **British Museum**,[a23] the Louvre, the Vatican Library, the **Pataliputra** ruins,[a24] Château de Compiègne, Mont Saint-Michel Abbey, and everywhere else that has grimoires that cannot be taken from where they are sealed. She stole them with her eyes and stores them as a grimoire library.”

He simply could not believe it.

He could not believe that these grimoires existed or that she had an eidetic memory.

However, what mattered was not its truth but the fact that someone *believed* it was true, and it resulted in the slicing of a girl's back.

"Well, she has no ability to refine magic power herself, so she's harmless." The cigarette in the corner of the magician's mouth moved up happily. "But since that stopper was prepared, the Church must have some concerns. Well, that has nothing to do with a magician like me. At any rate, those 103,000 grimoires are quite dangerous, so I came to shelter her before *anyone who would use them* comes to take her away."

"To… shelter her?"

Kamijou Touma was utterly astonished. What had that man just said in the face of such a blood-red scene?

"Yeah, that's right. Shelter her. No matter how sensible and good hearted she may be, she cannot stand up to torture and drugs. The mere thought of handing a girl over to the likes of them hurts my heart, y'know?"

"…"

Kamijou's body trembled.

Not pure anger: goosebumps covered his arm. The man before him only viewed himself as true; he lived ignoring his own mistakes. All of that put together sent a chill across Kamijou's entire body like that of plunging into a bathtub filled to the brim with tens of thousands of slugs.

The term "mad cult" oozed into his brain.

The thought of magicians that hunted people based on groundless beliefs made him feel like the nerves of his brain were going to burst.

"Who the hell, do you think you are!?"

His right hand felt engulfed in heat as if responding to his anger.

His two feet that had been planted to the ground shifted before he even thought about moving. His thick body of flesh and blood charged toward the magician like a bullet. He clenched his right fist so hard that he felt like he was smashing

his fingers to pieces.

His right hand was of no use. It would not help him defeat even a single delinquent, would not raise his scores on tests, and would not make him popular with girls.

But his right hand could also be quite useful. After all, he could still use it to punch out the bastard standing before him.

“I would prefer to call myself as Stiyl Magnus, but I guess I’ll have to go with Fortis931.”

The magician was completely motionless except for the wagging of the cigarette in the corner of his mouth.

After muttering something under his breath, he spoke to Kamijou as if introducing the pet black cat he was proud of.

“That’s my magic name. Not familiar with those? It seems we magicians cannot give our true name when we use magic. It’s an old tradition, so I don’t really understand why myself.”

They were 15 meters apart.

Kamijou Touma filled half of that gap in just three steps.

“Fortis… I guess in Japanese it would mean ‘the strong’. Well, the etymology doesn’t really matter. What’s important is that I have given that name. For us magicians, it is less a magical name when spell casting and more like…”

Even as Kamijou Touma took two more steps down the passageway, the magician’s smile did not crumble. He seemed to be claiming that Kamijou was not an opponent even worth ridding his smile over.

“…a killing name, I guess.”

The magician named Stiyl Magnus grabbed the cigarette from his mouth and flicked it away to the side.

The lit cigarette flew horizontally, over the metal railing, and hit the wall of the

neighboring building.

An orange line traced the cigarette's path as an afterimage and sparks flew when it hit the wall.

"**Kenaz** (Flames)."[12]

The instant that Stiyl muttered, the orange line exploded.

A sword of flames appeared in a straight line as if someone had turned on a fire hose loaded with gasoline. The paint gradually changed color like a picture being scorched by a lighter.

He was not in contact with the fire but it still felt like his eyes were being burned just by watching it. Kamijou instinctually stopped running and brought his hands up to cover his face.

Kamijou stopped so suddenly that it looked like his feet had been staked to the ground. A sudden question entered his mind.

Imagine Breaker could negate any kind of supernatural power in one blow. Not even the Level 5 Biri Biri girl's Railgun, which could destroy a nuclear shelter in one strike, was an exception to that.

But the truth was…

Kamijou had yet to see any supernatural power whose nature was non-psychic.

In other words, he had never tested it.

He had never tested it on magic.

Would his right hand really work on the strange power known as magic?

"**Purisaz Naupiz Gebo** (A gift of pain for the giant.)"

Past the hands covering his face, Kamijou could see the magician smiling.

While smiling, Stiyl Magnus swung the blazing flame sword horizontally at Kamijou Touma.

The instant it touched him, it lost shape and exploded in all directions like an erupting volcano.

Heat waves, flashes of light, explosive noise, and black smoke burst in every direction.

“Maybe I overdid it.”

Stiyl scratched at his head in front of what looked like the aftermath of a bombing. Just to be sure, he looked around to see if anyone was coming out to see what was going on. It was the first day of summer vacation, so most of the residents of that boy’s dorm would be out. However, it would be bad if some friendless shut-in was in one of the rooms.

He could not see ahead directly because of the screen of flames and smoke.

However, he did not need to check. That strike had created hellish flames of 3000 degrees Celsius. At temperatures above 2000 degrees Celsius, the human body would melt before it burned which meant the boy likely looked similar to the metal railing that had melted like a sugar sculpture. It was probable that he was splattered across the dorm wall like a used piece of gum.

Stiyl heaved a sigh as he reflected on how right he had been to get the boy away from Index. Things would have been a bit more difficult if the boy had used Index’s injured form as a shield.

But he could not retrieve Index as things were.

Stiyl sighed again. The wall of flames blocked him from heading to the other end of the passageway where Index was. If there was another emergency staircase on the other side of the passageway, he could manage. But, it would hardly be funny if Index got caught in the inferno while he took such a detour.

Stiyl shook his head in annoyance and spoke as he peered into the smoke one last time as if he could see through it.

“Thank you. Excellent work but too bad. Well, at that level, you couldn’t win even if you had a thousand tries.”

“Are you so sure I can’t win no matter how many times I try?”

For an instant, the magician froze in place at the voice coming from those hellish flames.

With a roar, the wall of flames and smoke swirled and was blown away.

It was as if a tornado[13] had appeared in the center of the flames and smoke and blew them all away.

Kamijou Touma stood there.

The metal railing had been melted like a sugar sculpture, the paint on the floor and walls had peeled, the fluorescent lights had melted and dripped down in the intense heat, but the boy had remained unharmed in the middle of those unworldly flames and scorching heats.

“Honestly, what was I so afraid of?” asked Kamijou rhetorically with the sides of his mouth twisted in disinterest. “*This is the same right hand that destroyed Index’s Walking Church.*”

In reality, Kamijou knew nothing about what was called magic.

He did not know how it worked or what went on where his eyes could not reach. Most likely, he would only understand half of it if it were explained to him from start to finish.

Regardless, there was one thing even an idiot like him understood. In the end, it was just a supernatural power.

The crimson flames he had blown away had not been completely extinguished.

In a perfect circle around Kamijou, the scorching flames continued to burn. But…

“Out of the way.”

With that one statement, Kamijou touched the 3000 degree magical flames with his right hand and the rest of the fire vanished.

It was like the candles in a birthday cake had all been blown out at once.

Kamijou Touma looked at the magician standing before him.

The magician was as flustered as any normal human being facing an unexpected turn of events.

In fact, he *was* a normal human being.

If you punched him, he would feel pain, and if you cut him with a cheap knife, he would bleed red.

He was a mere human being.

Kamijou's legs were no longer cramped with fear and his body was no longer frozen with nerves.

His arms and legs moved like normal.

He moved!

"…Wha-?"

Meanwhile, Stiyl very nearly took a step backwards in shock of the incomprehensible phenomenon before him.

From what had become of the surroundings, that attack could not have been a dud. But did that mean that boy was powerful enough to withstand 3000 degrees? No, if so, he would not have been human.

Kamijou Touma paid no heed to Stiyl's confusion.

He clenched his heated right fist as hard as a rock and took a step toward Stiyl who was swaying on his feet.

"Tch!!"

Stiyl swung his right hand horizontally. The flame sword that appeared followed suit and flew forcefully toward Kamijou.

It exploded. Flames and smoke flew about.

But after the flames and smoke were blown away, Kamijou Touma stood there

just as before.

“…Could he be using magic?” Stiyl muttered under his breath, but he immediately rejected the idea.

There could not be any magicians in that country that knew more about Christmas than magic and only knew Christmas as a day of dating and sex.

Also, if Index, despite lacking magic power, were to join forces with a magician, she would have had no reason to run. That… was how dangerous Index’s memories were.

The 103,000 grimoires were on a completely different scope even in comparison to the possessing of a nuclear weapon.

All living creatures eventually die, an apple dropped from above would fall down, and 1+1=2. You would be able to take those kinds of natural and unchangeable rules of the world, destroy them, rewrite them, and create new ones. You could make 1+1=3, make an apple dropped from below fall up, and make all dead creatures eventually be revived.

Magicians called such beings Magic Gods.

Not the god of the demon plane,[14] but a magician who had thoroughly mastered magic to the point of entering the domain of God.

Magic God.

But, Stiyl could not feel any magic power in the boy in front of him.

He would be able to tell at a glance if he was a magician. The boy did not have the “scent” of someone from the same world as him.

Then, why?

“!!”

To hide the shudder spreading through his body, Stiyl created another flame sword and attacked Kamijou. This time, it failed to even explode.

Kamijou swatted at the flame sword with his right hand like flyswatter and the flame sword shattered like glass and disappeared into thin air.

He shattered that 3000 degree flame sword with a right hand that had no magical reinforcements of any kind.

"…Ah."

Abruptly, truly abruptly, something floated up in the back of Stiyl Magnus's mind.

Index's Walking Church nun's habit was pope-class and its barrier rivaled a London cathedral in its power. It was absolutely impossible to destroy it unless the legendary dragon of St. George appeared.

But Index's Walking Church had clearly been utterly destroyed since Kanzaki had sliced her.

Who had done it? And how?

"……"

By that point, Kamijou Touma had walked right up to Stiyl.

With one more step, he would be close enough to punch the magician.

"**MTWOTFFTO.** (One of the five great elements from which the world is constructed.) **IIGOIIOF.** (The great flame of the beginning.)"

An unpleasant sweat began to drip from Stiyl's entire body. This was because the creature before him in a summer uniform had taken the form of a human. Stiyl's spine trembled as he got the feeling that inside that boy's skin was not flesh and blood but some strange oozing something.

"**IIBOLAIIAOE.** (It is a light of blessing that raises life and a light of judgment that punishes evil.) **IIMHAIIBOD.** (It is overflowing with calm blessings and with freezing misfortune that destroys cold darkness.) **IINFIIMS.** (Its name is fire and its role is the sword.) **ICRMMBGP!** (Be manifested and become the power that eats into my body!)"

The torso of Stiyl's priest's habit swelled out and forces from within popped off the buttons.

With the roar of flames sucking in oxygen, a giant mass of fire shot out from within his clothes.

It was not merely a mass of flames.

The crimson burning flames had something black and dripping like fuel oil at its core. It was in the form of a human. The thing was reminiscent of the seabirds dripping with black fuel oil after a tanker accident, and it was eternally burning.

Its name was **Innocentius**.[a25] Its meaning was "I will surely kill you."

The giant flame god who bore the meaning of certain death spread its arms and charged toward Kamijou Touma like a bullet.

"Out of the way."

Kamijou used a backhanded blow with the annoyed attitude of someone brushing aside a spider web.

Kamijou Touma blew away Stiyl Magnus's final trump card. As if he had stabbed a water balloon with a pin, the human-shaped fuel oil symbolizing the giant flame god burst into spray and scattered about the area.

"…?"

Kamijou Touma had no real reason for not taking his last step at that moment.

It was simply that Stiyl was still smiling despite having his final trump card destroyed. That expression was enough to make him hesitate before carelessly taking that last step.

The sound of a viscous liquid moving could be heard from all around.

"Wha-!?"

As Kamijou took a step back in surprise, the black spray returned from all directions, gathered in midair, and reformed into a human shape.

If Kamijou had taken that last step, he would certainly have been enveloped by flames from all directions.

Kamijou's mind was thrown into disarray at the scene before his eyes. If his right hand could do what he was always saying it could, it could negate even the systems of God seen in myths in a single strike. If that had been the supernatural power known as magic, he should have been able to negate it with that one touch. And yet…

The oily fuel within the flames writhed, changed form, and now seemed to be holding a sword in both hands.

No, it was not a sword but a giant cross, over two meters long, of the crucifying type.

It lifted the cross up with both hands and aimed a downwards swing at Kamijou's head like a pickaxe.

"…!!"

Kamijou immediately held up his right hand to receive the blow. Disregarding his right hand, Kamijou was a simple high school student. He lacked the battle skills needed to see through the attack and evade.

The cross and his right hand clashed.

This time, it failed to even disappear. As if he were grasping a mass of rubber, Kamijou felt that he was going to be the one to lose that struggle. His opponent used both hands while he could only use his right hand. The flaming cross neared Kamijou's face millimeter by millimeter.

Despite his confusion, Kamijou just narrowly managed to realize one fact: that mass of flames known as Innocentius was definitely reacting to his Imagine Breaker. However, it was being revived soon after annihilation. Most likely, the lag between annihilation and revival was less than a tenth of a second.

His right hand had been sealed.

If he let go for even an instant, he would likely be turned to ash by Innocentius in that instant.

“Runes.”

Kamijou Touma heard something.

Due to the danger in front of him, he could not turn around, but he certainly heard someone’s voice.

“Those twenty four characters used to indicate mysteries and secrets have been used as a magic language by Germanic tribes since the 2nd Century and are found in the roots of Old English.”

However, Kamijou could not believe it was Index’s voice despite knowing it was.

“Wha-…?”

Despite how beat up and bloody she was, how could she be speaking so calmly? He shakily thought.

“Attacking Innocentius will have no effect. Unless the rune engravings carved into the walls, floor, and ceiling are eliminated, it will revive as many times as necessary.”

Kamijou Touma supported his right wrist with his left hand and just barely managed to keep the cross from advancing any further.

Kamijou *timidly* turned around.

The girl was indeed collapsed there but Kamijou was unable to give “that” the name “Index”. Like a machine, her eyes were utterly lacking in emotion.

With each word she spoke, more blood flowed from the wound on her back.

She paid no heed and seemed to truly be nothing more than a system meant to explain magic.

“You’re… Index, right?”

“Yes. I am the grimoire library belonging to **Necessarius**,[a26] the 0th Parish of the Anglican Church. My proper name is Index Librorum Prohibitorum, but that

can be abbreviated to Index.”

The way that grimoire library named Index was acting, Kamijou almost forgot about the giant flame god trying to kill him. He experienced such a chill coming from her.

“With my introduction complete, I will return to my explanation of runic magic. Simply put, it is like a reflection of the moon in a lake at night. No matter how many times you strike the lake surface with a sword, it has no meaning. If you want to strike the moon in the lake surface, you must first turn your sword on the real moon floating in the night sky.”

After hearing that explanation, Kamijou finally remembered the enemy in front of him.

Did she mean that what stood before him was not the true form of the supernatural power? Was it something like a photograph and its negative? Would it continue to revive unless he destroyed a different supernatural power that was creating the giant flame god?

Even then, Kamijou did not completely believe what Index was saying.

No matter what was going on around him, the common understanding that magic did not exist refused to leave him.

But, with Innocentius sealing his right hand and preventing his movement, he could not test anything regardless. On top of that, it would have been difficult to ask Index to help him, given her bloody state.

“Ash to ash…”

Kamijou looked up in shock. From beyond the giant flame god, a flame sword had appeared in Stiyl’s right hand.

“...Dust to dust…”

Another one. A bluish-white burning flame sword extended silently from his left hand.

“**…Squeamish Bloody Rood!**”[a27]

With those power-filled words, he swung the two flame swords horizontally so that they would slice straight through the giant flame god from left and right like a giant pair of scissors. With his right hand sealed by Innocentius,

Kamijou could block nothing else.

(Shit… I need to run!!)

Before Kamijou Touma could even shout out, the two flame swords struck the giant flame god and the forces morphed into one enormous, exploding bomb.

Part 7

When the flames and smoke cleared, the entire area looked like hell.

The metal railings had warped like sugar sculptures, and even the floor tiles had melted into something glue-like. The paint on the walls had peeled such that the concrete was visible.

The boy was nowhere to be seen.

However, Stiyl heard the footsteps of someone running along the passageway downstairs.

"…Innocentius," he whispered and the flames spread out across the area returned to human form, went over the railing, and followed the footsteps.

Internally, Stiyl was astonished. Nothing all that amazing had happened. Just before the explosion, in the instant Stiyl had sliced through the giant flame god with the two flame swords, Kamijou had let go with his right hand and jumped over the railing.

As he fell, Kamijou had grabbed the railing one floor below and pulled himself up onto the passageway. He had no lifeline and had pulled it off with pure guts and courage, making the recklessness rather apparent.

“But…”

Stiyl gave a gentle smile. Kamijou now knew the weakness of the runes thanks to the knowledge of Index’s 103,000 grimoires. As she had said, the rune magic Stiyl used was activated by carved engravings. That also meant that getting rid of the engravings would negate even the most powerful magic.

“So what?” Stiyl’s expression showed no sign of concern. “You can’t do it. It is utterly impossible for you to completely get rid of the runes carved into this building.”

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“I…! I really thought…! I really thought I was going to die back there!!”

After jumping over the railing on the 7th floor with no lifeline, Kamijou’s heart was still pounding in his chest.

As he ran along the straight passageway, he looked around. In some way, he doubted Index’s words. He had merely been trying to get away from Innocentius so that he could get some time to prepare himself.

“Damn it! What the hell is this!?”

But, Kamijou could not help but shout out when he saw what lay before him.

He did not need to wonder where the runes were carved into the large dorm building. In fact, he had already found them. They were on the floor, on the doors, and on the fire extinguisher. Scraps of paper about the size of telephone cards were stuck all over the building like Hoichi the Earless.

Based on Index’s advice (he did not like having to recall that doll-like face), he had guessed that the magic was something like a jamming signal called a barrier and the runes were like the antennae sending the signal. But could he even tear off every single one of the tens of thousands of “antennae”?

With the roar of oxygen being absorbed, a human-shaped inferno dropped down onto the opposite side of the metal railing.

“Shit!!”

If he were to be caught again, tearing off the runes would have been impossible. Kamijou immediately made a dash for the emergency staircase to his side. As he jumped further and further down, he could see scraps of paper taped to the corners of the staircase and ceiling with strange symbols that must have been runes written on them.

They had clearly been mass produced with a copy machine.

Kamijou almost shouted out “How’s a crappy copy like that supposed to work!?” but he then recalled that the appendix of a shoujo manga could be used for tarot divination and even the Bible was mass produced at a print shop.

(Y’know… the occult just isn’t fair.)

He felt like crying. Tens of thousands of those “rune engravings” were probably taped up all over the building. Could he find every single one of them? And, for all he knew, Stiyl was taping up new pieces of copy paper at that very moment.

As if to cut off his train of thought, Innocentius dropped down from farther up the staircase.

“Shit!”

Kamijou gave up on heading further down the staircase and ran out into the passageway to the side. When the giant flame god struck the floor, flames scattered about the area and it charged into the passageway even as it bounced up from hitting the ground.

The passageway was straight and Kamijou had no way to escape Innocentius when it came down to pure speed.

“…!”

Kamijou looked over to the entrance of the emergency staircase. According to the display, he was on the 2nd floor.

With a roar, Innocentius charged straight forward in order to arrest Kamijou’s right hand.

“O-Owah!!”

Instead of using his right hand or running away along the passageway, Kamijou jumped over the second floor railing.

It was only after he jumped that he realized that the ground below was asphalt and that a number of bicycles were stopped there.

“Waaaaaaaahhhhhhh!!”

He just barely managed to land between two bicycles, but he still landed on hard asphalt. He tried to bend his knees to absorb the shock of impact, but he still heard an unpleasant noise come from his ankle. He had only jumped from the second story and it did not feel broken, but he had hurt his ankle a bit all the same.

He heard the roar of flames absorbing oxygen coming from above.

“!?”

Kamijou scrambled along the ground, kicking bicycles over as he did so, but nothing more happened.

“?”

Kamijou looked up with a puzzled expression.

Still making the roaring noise, Innocentius was clinging to the second story railing and staring at Kamijou, who was on the ground. It was almost like there was an invisible wall preventing it from following Kamijou.

Apparently, the runes had only been placed on the dorm building. Kamijou had managed to escape Stiyl’s flames by leaving the building.

Seeing that aspect of the runes made him feel like he now knew a bit about the invisible system of magic. He was not against a ridiculous opponent like the magicians in RPGs who could do anything by chanting a spell. Instead, his opponent acted based on set rules similar to the espers that Kamijou knew.

He sighed.

Having been freed from any immediate threat to his life, strength left Kamijou's body. He sat down on the ground without even thinking. He was not afraid. Instead, he was assaulted with a different feeling that was more like a languid exhaustion. He started to wonder if he could escape all danger if he just ran away.

"I know. The Anti-Skill," Kamijou muttered.[15]

Why had he not thought of it before? Academy City's Anti-Skill were something like an anti-esper special unit. Kamijou could just notify them rather than risk his own life.

Kamijou checked his pants pocket, but his cell phone had been crushed under his very own foot that morning.

Kamijou looked out toward the road and searched for a pay phone.

He was not doing it to run away.

He was not doing it to run away.

—Then will you follow me to the depths of hell?

And yet, those words still seemed to stab his chest.

He was doing nothing wrong. He was doing nothing wrong, but…

In that very same situation, Index had gone back for Kamijou Touma. Kamijou could not fathom going down to hell with a stranger that he had known for less than half an hour.

"Damn it. That's right. If I don't want to follow you to the depths of hell," Kamijou smiled, "Then I'll just have to drag you back out."

He thought it was about time he understood it.

He did not know how magic worked, but he did not need to know the workings of what he could not see. He could, for example, send an email without knowing the circuit diagram of his cell phone.

"*…Huh. Once you understand that, it's really not that big of a deal.*"

He knew what he had to do, so now, he just needed to try it.

Even if he failed, it was still much better than doing nothing.

A metal railing warped and glowing orange fell down and Kamijou frantically rolled out of the way.

He may have made up his mind, but he still had to do something about that Innocentius before he could save Index. The real problem was the tens of thousands of runes. But could he really tear off all of those scraps of paper taped to the building?

"…Y'know, I'm surprised the fire alarm hasn't gone off with all of this going on."

It had just been an offhand comment, but Kamijou Touma froze in place once he said it.

The fire alarm?

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The fire alarms installed around the building all went off at once.

"!?"

Amid that storm of roaring noise that sounded as loud as a bombing raid, Stiyl looked up at the ceiling.

Without a second's delay, the attached sprinklers sent out a typhoon-like manmade rain. Since having the firefighters called in would be a pain, Stiyl had written his orders for Innocentius such that it would not trigger the security sensors. This meant that Kamijou Touma had hit the fire alarm.

Did he think doing so would put out Innocentius' flames?

"…"

The notion was almost laughably ridiculous, but the magician believed the blood vessels in his head would burst when he considered that he was getting soaked for such a foolish reason.

Stiyl stared at the red fire alarm on the wall in annoyance.

It was easy enough to set the alarm off, but he could not stop it himself. As it was summer break, most of the residents of the dorm were out, but the situation could turn bothersome should firefighters arrive.

"…Hm."

Stiyl looked around the area and then quickly picked up Index to leave. His goal was simply to recover Index, so there was no reason to get caught up in killing Kamijou. Given how long it would take for the firefighters to arrive, he could leave Innocentius on auto-chase, and the boy would get a nice flaming embrace that would turn him into black charcoal or white ash.

(This doesn't mean the elevator is stopped, does it?)

He had heard that elevators were made to stop during emergencies. That would be quite depressing for Stiyl. He was on the 7th floor. Even if she were a girl, carrying an unconscious person down stairs was tiring.

That was why Stiyl was initially relieved to hear the microwave oven-like "ding" come from behind him.

Then he came to his senses.

Who was it? Who was on the elevator?

It was the evening of summer vacation and he had already checked to make sure all of the students had left the dorm, leaving it deserted. So who was it, and why did they need the elevator?

The doors of the elevator clanked as they opened up. A single footstep on the floor wet from the sprinklers reverberated through the passageway.

Stiyl slowly turned around.

He had no idea why his body was trembling on the inside.

Kamijou Touma stood there.

(What? What happened to Innocentius?)

Thoughts whirled around chaotically in Stiyl's head. Innocentius was like a cutting edge missile loaded in a fighter. After it locked on, it could never be escaped. No matter where you ran or hid, it would use its 3000 degree flames to melt through walls or obstacles, even if they were made of steel, and continue its chase. It was not something that could be escaped just by running around a building.

Yet he stood there.

He stood there unfazed, unstoppable, unassailable, and most of all, an unequivocal natural enemy.

"Come to think of it, runes are supposed to be carved into the walls and the floor, right?" said Kamijou as the cold manmade rain poured down on him. "Really, you're damn amazing. To be honest, I would've had no way to win if you had carved them with a knife. Feel free to brag about this all you want."

As he spoke, Kamijou Touma raised his right arm and pointed above his head.

He pointed at the ceiling… at the sprinkler.

"…You can't mean! Those 3000 degree flames couldn't be put out by this!"

"Don't be stupid. Not the flames. How can you put those things all over people's homes?"

Stiyl then recalled the tens of thousands of rune papers he had set up on the dorm.

Paper was weak to water. Even kindergartners knew that.

By spraying water all over the building with the sprinklers, it did not matter if

there were tens of thousands of the runes. He did not need to run around the building. Instead, he could press a single button and destroy all of the scraps of paper.

The muscles of the magician's face spasmed.

"Innocentius!"

The instant he shouted that, the elevator door behind Kamijou melted like a sugar sculpture, and the giant flame god crawled out into the passageway.

Each time the raindrops hit its body of flames, they evaporated with the sound of a beast's breathing.

"Ha ha ha. Ah ha ha ha ha ha! Amazing! You have the battle sense of a genius! But you lack experience. Copy paper is not the same as toilet paper. Just getting it a bit wet isn't going to completely dissolve it!" The magician spread his arms while laughter exploded from his mouth and he shouted, "Kill him!"

Innocentius swung its arm like a hammer.

"Out of the way."

Kamijou Touma made that one statement. He did not turn around.

His right hand touched the giant flame god with a backhand blow and Innocentius exploded into all directions with a laughably pathetic noise.

"Wha-!?"

Stiyl Magnus's heart truly did stop for an instant out of shock.

After being blown away, Innocentius did not revive. Black, fuel oil-like chunks of flesh were splattered about the area and all the chunks could do was squirm feebly.

"Im…possible… How… How! My runes haven't been destroyed yet!"

"What about the ink?" It seemed to take 5 years for Kamijou Touma's voice to reach Stiyl's ears. "Even if the copy paper hasn't been destroyed, the water will

make the ink come off.” Kamijou spoke in a leisurely manner. “Although, the water didn’t seem to take out every last one.”

The squirming pieces of Innocentius disappeared into thin air one at a time as the manmade rain continued to flow from the sprinklers. It was as if the ink on the copy paper taped all over the building was coming off in the rain one by one, causing Innocentius to lose power bit by bit.

The chunks of flesh disappeared one by one until finally the last one dissolved and disappeared.

“Innocentius… Innocentius!”

The magician’s words were like those of a man shouting into a phone receiver after being hung up on.

“Now then.”

That one statement was enough to make the magician’s entire body flinch.

Kamijou Touma took a step toward Stiyl Magnus.

“Inno…centius…” the magician said… but not a single thing in the world responded.

Kamijou Touma took another step toward Stiyl Magnus.

“Innocentius… Innocentius, Innocentius!” the magician shouted… but not a single thing in the world changed.

Kamijou Touma finally started charging toward Stiyl Magnus like a bullet.

“A-Ash to ash, dust to dust, Squeamish Bloody Rood!” the magician finally roared, but not even a sword of flames appeared, much less the giant flame god.

Kamijou Touma drew near Stiyl Magnus and then continued even closer.

He clenched his fist.

He clenched his utterly normal right hand. He clenched his right hand that would be of no use unless in contact with the supernatural. He clenched his right hand

that would not defeat even a single delinquent, not raise his test scores, and not make him popular with girls.

However, his right hand could also be quite useful.

After all, he could use it to punch out the bastard standing before him.

Kamijou Touma’s fist slammed into the magician’s face.

The magician’s body rotated like a bamboo copter, and the back of his head struck the metal railing.

Chapter 2: The Illusionist Bestows Demise. *The_7th-Egde.*

Part 1

It was night; the sirens of an ambulance and fire trucks rang from the main road and echoed by.

The dorm had seemed mostly abandoned, but the triggering of the fire alarm and the subsequent sprinklers going off had changed matters. In no time at all, the empty dorm was filled with fire trucks and onlookers.

Kamijou had used his right hand to destroy the tracking function of the hood in his room before taking it with him. Had he left it working and abandoned it in some arbitrary place, he could have fooled the pursuers, but she obstinately insisted that she take it with her.

Kamijou Touma clicked his tongue in a back alley. He held Index's bloody form in his arms as he could not let her wound touch the dirty ground.

He could not hand Index over to an ambulance.

Academy City fundamentally disliked outsiders. That was why walls surrounded the city and three satellites were constantly monitoring all activities. Even the drivers of the trucks that supplied convenience stores needed an exclusive ID to get in.

For that reason, information about an outsider without an ID, like Index, would spread if she were hospitalized.

Not to mention, her enemy was part of some organization.

If she were attacked there, the damage would spread to those around her. Also, she would be defenseless if she were attacked while recovering or in surgery.

“But I can’t just leave her like this.”

“I’ll… be fine. If you… can just stop the bleeding…”

Index’s voice was weak and showed no hint of the mechanical voice she donned while explaining about runes.

And, that was why Kamijou immediately knew that what she had said was wrong. Her wound was beyond something an amateur could solve by wrapping bandages. Kamijou was accustomed to fights, and he performed first aid on himself for most of the wounds best kept secret. But, the wound on her back was bad enough to make even Kamijou lose his cool.

There remained only one thing that they could rely on.

He still did not believe in it, but he had nothing else left to believe in.

“Hey, hey! Can you hear me?” Kamijou lightly slapped Index’s cheek. “Is there anything that can heal wounds in those 103,000 grimoires of yours?”

Kamijou’s idea of magic was nothing more than the attack magic and recovery magic in RPGs.

It was true that Index had said that she was naturally unable to process magic power by herself and therefore could not use magic; but, Kamijou could handle supernatural powers, so if Index would just tell him what to do…

Index’s breathing was shallow. However, this was more due to blood loss than pain. Her pale lips trembled.

“There is… but…”

Kamijou’s face lit up for an instant until the word “but” belatedly caught in his mind.

“You… can’t do it…” Index let out a small breath. “Even if I… taught you the spell… your power would surely… get in the way… ow… even if you

perfectly… imitated it.”

Kamijou looked down at his right hand in shock.

Imagine Breaker. The power residing there had indeed completely negated Stiyl’s flames. And so there was a chance that it would negate Index’s recovery magic the same way.

“Shit! Not again… Why is it always this right hand’s fault!?”

That just meant that he needed to call someone such as Aogami Pierce or that Biri Biri girl, Misaka Mikoto. The faces of a few tough people whom he would have no worries about getting involved in this kind of trouble floated up in his mind.

“…?” Index fell silent for a bit. “No… That isn’t what I meant.”

“?”

“Not your right hand… The problem is… that you’re an esper.” In that broiling night, she shivered like on a snowy mountain in midwinter. “Magic is not… something to be used by ‘talented people’ like you espers. ‘Untalented people’ wanted… to do what the ‘talented people’ could do… so they created certain spells and rituals… which are known as magic.”

Kamijou was about ready to shout, “This is no time for explanations!”

“You don’t get it…? The circuitry is different between ‘talented people’ and ‘untalented people…’ ‘Talented people’ cannot use the systems created… for the ‘untalented people…’”

“Wha-…?”

Kamijou was left speechless. It was true that drugs and electrodes were used on espers like Kamijou to forcibly expand the circuitry of their brains in a way that made it different from a normal human’s. It was true that their bodies were different from others.

But he could not believe it. No, he did not want to believe it.

2.3 million students lived in Academy City and every single one of them had undergone the powers development Curriculum. Even if it were not visibly apparent, even if they could not bend a spoon with efforts so strenuous they burst the blood vessels in their brain, and even if they were the weakest of espers, they were indeed made differently from a normal person.

In other words, the people who lived in that city could not use magic, the one thing that could save the girl.

There was a way to save the person who lay before him, and yet not a single person could.

“Damn it…” Kamijou bared his canines like a beast. “How could this happen? How could this happen!? What the hell is this!? How is this fair!?”

Index’s trembling grew worse.

What Kamijou found the most difficult to bear was the fact that she received punishment for his own inability.

“‘Talented’ my ass,” he spat out. “I can’t even save the girl suffering before my eyes.”

However, he could come up with no other solution to the situation. The fact that the 2.3 million students living in the city could not use magic was the rule he needed to break down first.

“…?”

Kamijou suddenly noticed something off about his thought process.

Students?

“Hey, any normal ‘talentless’ person can use magic, right?”

“…Eh? Yes.”

“And this isn’t going to end up being useless because the person has no talent for magic, right?”

“You don’t… need to worry about that… As long as they prepare correctly and perform it correctly… even a middle school student should be able to do it.” Index thought for a bit. “Although, if they get the steps wrong, the pathways in their brain and their neural circuitry could be fried… But with the knowledge of my 103,000 grimoires, it will be fine. Do not worry.”

Kamijou smiled.

Without thinking, he looked up as if to howl at the moon in the night sky.

It was true that 2.3 million students lived in Academy City and that they had all been developed to have some kind of esper power.

However, the teachers that developed them were normal humans.

“I hope she isn’t already asleep.”

The face of a certain teacher appeared in Kamijou Touma’s mind.

It was the face of Tsukuyomi Komoe, the 135 centimeter tall homeroom teacher of his class who a red randoseru[16] would suit despite her being a teacher.

● ● ●

Kamijou used a pay phone to get Komoe-sensei’s address from Aogami Pierce. (Kamijou had dropped and broken his phone that morning. Why Aogami Pierce knew Komoe’s address was a mystery. Kamijou suspected he was a stalker.) Kamijou then began to walk with Index’s limp form on his back.

“This is the place…”

He arrived after 15 minutes of walking from that back alley.

Utterly unbefitting of Komoe-sensei’s 12 year old appearance, it was a two story wooden apartment building that looked so old and worn down that Kamijou felt it must have weathered the bombing of Tokyo. Since the washing machine was sitting directly out in the passageway, it must have had nothing like a bath.

Normally, Kamijou would joke about it for the next 10 minutes, but he did not even smile.

After checking the nameplates on the first floor's doors, he climbed up the run-down and rusty metal staircase and checked the doors there. When he reached the door furthest back on the second floor, he had finally found "Tsukuyomi Komoe" written in hiragana.

Kamijou rang the doorbell twice and then kicked at the door with all his might.

His foot striking the door made a tremendous noise.

However, the door did not so much as budge. True to form, Kamijou had the misfortune to think he heard an unpleasant crack come from his big toe.

"~ ~ ~!!"

"Yes, yes, yeees! The anti-newspaper salesman door is the only sturdy thing here. I'll open it, okay?"

(Why didn't I just wait?)

As Kamijou had that teary-eyed thought, the door clicked open and a pajama wearing Komoe-sensei's head poked out through the crack. Her relaxed expression made it clear that she could not see Index's back wound from her position.

"Wah, Kamijou-chan. Did you start working part time as a newspaper salesman?"

"What newspaper has its workers solicit people with a nun on their backs?" remarked Kamijou with displeasure. "I'm in a bit of trouble, so I'll be coming in. Excuse me."

"W-Wait, wait, wait!" Komoe-sensei frantically tried to block Kamijou's way as he pushed her aside. "I-I can't have you suddenly coming into my room. And it isn't just because my room is a horrible mess with empty beer cans littering the floor and cigarette butts piled up in the ash tray!"

“Sensei.”

“Yes?”

“…See if you can make the same joke after seeing what I’m carrying on my back.”

“I-I wasn’t joking! …Gyahhh!?”

“So now you notice it!”

“I didn’t see you had such a bad wound on your back, Kamijou-chan!”

Komoe-sensei began to panic at the sudden sight of blood and Kamijou finally managed to push her aside and enter the room.

It looked like a room belonging to a middle aged man who loved betting on horse races. The badly worn tatami mats had countless empty beer cans strewn across them, and the silver ash tray had a veritable mountain of cigarette butts in it. In what seemed like some kind of joke, in the middle of the room there was even a tea table of the kind a stubborn father would flip over.

“…I see. So you weren’t joking.”

“I suppose it is hardly the time, but do you have a problem with girls who smoke?”

Kamijou felt that was hardly the problem as he stared at his homeroom teacher who appeared 12 and kicked some beer cans out of the way to clear an open spot. He was reluctant to sit on the worn tatami mat, but there was no time to worry about preparing a futon.

He laid Index face down on the floor to ensure her wound did not touch the floor.

The way her clothes were torn hid the actual wound from view, but a dark red liquid was flowing out like fuel oil.

“Sh-Shouldn’t you call an ambulance? Th-The phone is over there.”

Komoe-sensei pointed toward a corner of the room with a trembling hand. For some reason, her phone was a black rotary dial phone.

“The mana in the blood is flowing out along with the blood.”

Kamijou and Komoe-sensei reflexively turned toward Index.

Index was still sprawled out limply on the floor but her eyes were silently open even as her head lay on its side like a broken doll. Her eyes were colder than the pale moonlight and more precise than the gears of a clock. Her eyes were so perfectly serene that they looked inhuman.

“Warning: Chapter 2, Verse 6. The loss of the life force known as mana due to blood loss has exceeded a certain amount and **John’s Pen**[a28] is being forcibly awoken. …If the current situation persists, my body will lose the bare minimum of necessary life force and expire in about 15 minutes according to the international standard minute defined by the clock tower in London. It would be best if you followed the instructions I am about to give in order to perform the most efficient treatment.”

Komoe-sensei stared at Index in shock.

Kamijou could hardly blame her. Even though he had heard that voice once before, he simply could not get used to it.

“Now then…”

Kamijou looked over at Komoe-sensei and thought.

If he out and bluntly asked her to use magic, she would surely tell him it was hardly the time to be pretending to be a magical girl and that she was much too old for that kind of thing anyway. So, how was he supposed to convince her?

“Hmm. Sensei, sensei. Since it’s an emergency, I’ll keep this short. I need to tell you a secret, so come over here.”

“What?”

Kamijou waved his hand like he was calling over a small dog and Komoe-sensei approached with no caution whatsoever.

“Sorry,” Kamijou apologized to Index under his breath.

He lifted up her ripped clothes to reveal the horrible wound hidden beneath.

“Ee!?”

He could hardly blame Komoe-sensei for jumping in shock.

The wound was so bad that it shocked even Kamijou. It was a horizontally straight line cut across her back. It was as if a cardboard box had been sliced using a ruler and box cutter. Beyond the red blood, pink muscle, and yellow fat, something hard and white that seemed to be her backbone was visible.

If the wound were viewed as a red mouth, the lips around it had gone utterly pale like a person who had been in a pool.

“Gh…” Kamijou forced away some dizziness and carefully lowered the clothing that was wet with blood.

Even when the clothes touched the wound, Index’s icy eyes did not move in the slightest.

“Sensei.”

“Eh? Yes!?”

“I’m going to call an ambulance. In the mean time, you need to listen to what this girl has to say and do whatever she wants… Just make sure she doesn’t lose consciousness. As you can tell by her clothing, she’s religious. Thanks.”

If she viewed it as nothing more than consoling the girl, she could continue to view magic as impossible. For that reason, Kamijou had changed the focus in Komoe-sensei’s mind from treating the wound to continuing the conversation by any means necessary.

Komoe-sensei was nodding with an extremely serious expression and pale face.

The one problem was that Kamijou had to kill time outside while it happened.

If an ambulance arrived before the magic were complete, the “consolation”

would end, meaning that he could not actually call an ambulance.

But, that alone did not mean Kamijou had to leave. After all, he could just dial 117 with the room's black phone and pretend to be calling an ambulance while actually speaking to a recording.

The real problem lay elsewhere.

"Hey, Index," Kamijou spoke softly to Index as she remained collapsed on the floor. "Is there anything I can do?"

"There is not. The best option for you would be to leave."

Her overly clear and concise wording made Kamijou clench his right fist so hard it was painful.

There was nothing Kamijou could do and it was all because of his right hand that would negate the recovery magic simply by being present in the room.

"…Then, sensei. I'm gonna go look for a pay phone."

"Wait… eh? Kamijou-chan, I have a phone he-…"

Kamijou ignored Komoe-sensei's words, opened the door, and left the room.

He gritted his teeth at the fact that he could do nothing but leave.

Kamijou ran through the city at night. As he ran, he clenched his right hand that could negate even the systems of God but could not protect a single person.

● ● ●

After Kamijou Touma left the room, Index moved her pale lips.

"What is the current time in Japan Standard Time? Also, what is the date?"

"It is 8:30 PM on July 20th…"

"You did not seem to reference a clock. Is the time accurate?"

“I do not have a clock in my room, but my internal clock is accurate down to the second, so do not worry.”

“…”

“You don’t need to doubt me that much. I have heard that some jockeys have internal clocks accurate to a tenth of a second and you can regulate it with certain eating habits and rhythmic activities,” explained Komoe-sensei in puzzlement.

She may not have been an esper, but she indeed was a resident of Academy City. The concepts of common knowledge that were normal for medical and scientific fronts were different between those within the city and those without.

Still lying face down on the floor, Index glanced out the window with only her eyes.

“From the location of the stars and angle of the moon… the time matches the direction of Sirius with an error of 0.038. Now, to check once more: the current time in Japan Standard Time is July 20th 8:30 PM, is that correct?”

“Yes. Well, technically it is now 53 seconds past that, but… Ah, no!! Don’t get up!!”

Komoe-sensei frantically tried to push Index back down as she tried to sit up, further damaging her already injured body, but Index’s gaze did not waver in the slightest.

Her gaze was neither frightening nor piercing.

All emotion had simply disappeared from her eyes as if a light switch had been turned off.

There lacked any real presence in her eyes. It was like her soul was missing.

“It is no matter. It can be regenerated,” said Index as she headed for the tea table in the center of the room. “It is near the end of Cancer. The time is between eight and midnight. The direction is west. Under the protection of Undine, the role of the angel is the cherub…”

The sound of Komoe-sensei gulping could be heard throughout the room.

Unexpectedly, Index began to draw some kind of figure atop the small tea table with her bloody finger. Even those unfamiliar with a magic circle would recognize it as something religious. Komoe-sensei had already grown timid, but now something overwhelmed her to the point of muteness.

After drawing a circle of blood that filled the tea table, Index drew a star-shaped symbol known as a pentagram.

Characters in some strange language were written all around it. The words were likely the same as Index's mutterings. She had asked about the constellations and time because the words written changed depending on the time and season.

As Index crafted her magic, she showed none of the weakness of one who was injured. Her extreme focus made it seem like her sense of pain had been temporarily cut off altogether.

A silent chill ran down Komoe-sensei's back as she heard the dripping of blood coming from the girl's back.

"W-W-Wh-What is this?"

"Magic." Index paused after that one word. "I will now need your help and your body. If you do as I say, no one will meet any misfortune and you will not be the target of anyone's resentment."

"H-How can you say that so calmly!? Just lie down and wait for the ambulance! Umm… bandages, bandages. With a wound this bad, I should bind the area around the artery to stop the flow of blood…"

"That level of treatment cannot completely close up my wound. I am not familiar with the term ambulance, but, is it capable of completely closing this wound in the next 15 minutes and supplying me with the needed level of mana?"

"…"

It was true that an ambulance would take 10 minutes to arrive, even if they called at exactly that instant, and would also take that long to take her back to the hospital, and on top of that, the treatment would not start the second she

arrived at the hospital. Komoe-sensei lacked the understanding of what an occult term like mana meant, but it was true that just closing the wound would not bring back her stamina.

Even if the wound were closed at that exact instant with a needle and thread, would that pale girl be too weak to live long enough to recover her missing stamina?

“Please.” inquired Index without the slightest change in her expression.

A mix of fresh blood and saliva was dripping from the corner of her mouth.

She had no intensity and there was nothing ghastly about her either. But, her calmness and composure were more frightening than either. How everything she did seemed to widen the wound made her seem like a broken machine continuing to run without realizing something was amiss.

(If I do anything that makes her resist, her situation could become even worse.)

Komoe-sensei sighed. Of course she did not believe in magic. However, Kamijou had asked her to keep the conversation going to make sure the girl did not lose consciousness.

All she could do was try not to provoke the girl sitting before her and place her hopes in Kamijou’s calling an ambulance as quickly as possible, if not sooner, and in the splendid first aid of the EMTs in the ambulance.

“So what should I do? I am not a magical girl.”

“I thank you for your cooperation. First… take that… that… what is that black thing?”

“? Oh, that is a video game memory card.”

“??? …Well, fine. At any rate, take that black thing and place it in the middle of the table.”

“Technically, it’s a tea table…”

Komoe-sensei did as she was told and placed the memory card in the middle of

the tea table. She then took a mechanical pencil lead case, an empty box of chocolates, and two small paperback books and put them on the tea table as well. She also took two small figurines that came with her food and lined them up next to each other.

Komoe-sensei wondered what the point of it was, but Index was still completely serious despite looking about ready to collapse. All of her complaints disappeared before the gaze as sharp as a Japanese sword that emanated from that pale face.

“What is this? You called it magic, but isn’t this just playing with dolls?”

Sure enough, it all looked like a miniature version of the room. The memory card was the tea table, the two books standing up were the bookshelf and closet, and the two figurines were in the exact place of the two individuals in the room. When glass beads were scattered over the tea table, they seemed to stop in places that perfectly emulated the beer cans scattered across the floor.

“The substances do not matter. It is the same as how a magnifying glass magnifies regardless of whether the lens is made of glass or plastic… As long as the form and role are the same, the ceremony is possible,” muttered Index as she dripped with sweat. “I just need you to accurately carry out my instructions. If you mistake the order, the pathways in your brain and your neural circuitry could be fried.”

“???”

“I am saying that failure will turn your body into mincemeat and kill you. Please be careful.”

“Bh!?” Komoe-sensei almost spat out, but Index continued without paying any heed.

“We will now create a temple for the angel to descend into. Follow my lead and chant.”

What Index said after that went beyond words and become nothing but sound. Without thinking about the meaning, Komoe-sensei attempted to copy just the tone into something like a hum or song.

And…

“Kyahh!?”

Suddenly, the figures on top of the tea table started to “sing” as well. “Kyahh!?” one of them screamed with the exact same timing. The figures were vibrating. Just as vibrations are transmitted along the string in a toy telephone and come out as a voice in the paper cup on the other end, the figure vibrated and reproduced Komoe-sensei’s voice.

The reason Komoe-sensei did not panic and run from the room right then and there was likely because she lived in a city housing 2.3 million espers. A normal person would have thought they were out of their mind.

“Link complete.” Index’s voice and the voice from the tea table made it sound double. “The temple created on the table has been linked to this room. To put it simply, everything that happens in this room will happen on the table and everything that happens on the table will happen in this room.”

Index pushed the tea table lightly with her foot.

In that instant, the entire apartment shook under Komoe-sensei’s feet as if from some great shock.

She could feel the stuffy air of the room growing as clear as the air in a forest in the early morning.

However, nothing akin to an angel was present. All that was present was what could only be described as an invisible presence. A feeling assaulted Komoe-sensei’s entire body like she was being watched by thousands of eyeballs from every direction.

And then, Index suddenly shouted.

“Imagine! Imagine a golden angel with the body of a child! Imagine a beautiful angel with two wings!”

When carrying out magic, determining the field was important.

For example, a pebble thrown into the sea creates a feeble ripple. However, a

pebble dropped into a bucket makes quite a ripple. The concept was the same. To alter the world with magic, the field in which the alteration would take place had to be demarcated.

A protector was a temporary god in a small demarcated world. If one properly imagined a protector, fixated its form, and freely controlled it, one could more easily cause mysterious things to happen in a limited field.

Komoe-sensei did not receive any such explanation and was having a hard time imagining an angel. The term “golden angel” only made her think of that thing about one gold one or five silver ones.[17]

As the image in Komoe-sensei’s mind lost coherence, the surrounding presence followed suit and lost its form. An unpleasant feeling ran down Komoe-sensei’s back like she was wrapped in the rotten mud from the bottom of a swamp.

“Just imagine it! This will not actually call in an angel. It is just a gathering of invisible mana. It will take form according to your will as the magic user!”

She must have truly been desperate because even the voice of that cool, mechanical Index grew as sharp as an icicle.

Komoe-sensei’s eyes opened wide at that sudden change and she hurriedly began to mutter under her breath.

(…A cute angel, a cute angel, a cute angel.)

Hazily, she frantically called up an image of the girl angel she had seen in a shoujo manga long ago.

Whatever it was that felt like invisible mud hanging in the room’s air took form as if it had been shoved inside a human-shaped balloon… or at least that was how it seemed to Komoe-sensei.

She timidly opened her eyes to check.

(…Huh? This will not actually call in an angel?)

The instant that doubt entered her mind, the human-shaped water balloon burst and the invisible mud splattered across the room.

“Kyahh!!”

“…The fixation of its form has failed.” Index looked around with her sharp gaze. “If the temple is at least protected by a blue color Undine, it will be enough. … Continue.”

Her words were positive enough, but Index’s eyes were not smiling in the slightest.

Komoe-sensei flinched back like a child whose parents had just seen a failed test that she had tried to keep hidden.

“Chant. It will be over with just a bit more.”

The sharp order refused to let Komoe-sensei lose her composure despite her rising confusion and flagging thoughts.

Index, Komoe-sensei, and the two figurines on the tea table sang. The back of Index’s figurine on the table began to melt.

It was as if it were rubber being held up to a lighter. It melted, the surface lost its unevenness, it grew smooth, it cooled and hardened once more, and its form came back together.

Komoe-sensei felt like her heart was freezing over.

Currently, Index was sitting across the tea table from her.

She did not have the courage to circle around and see what was happening to Index’s back.

Index’s pale face was covered in oily sweat.

Her glassy eyes still showed no sign of pain or suffering.

“Replenishment of mana and stabilization of condition confirmed. Returning John’s Pen to dormant mode.”

Like a switch had been flipped, a soft light returned to Index’s eyes. Like a fire being lit in a cooled fireplace, warmth filled the room’s atmosphere.

The look in Index's eyes was so kind and warm that Komoe-sensei could not help but feel that warmth. It was the look of a normal girl.

"Now, if the descended protector is returned and the temple destroyed, it will be over." Index smiled painfully. "This is what magic is. It's the same as how "apple" and "ringo"{refn|Ringo is Japanese for apple.}} mean the same thing. You don't need a glass wand when a plastic umbrella is just as clear. It's the same thing with tarot cards. As long as the design and numbers match, you can perform divinations with the cut outs from the back of a shoujo manga."

Index's sweating did not stop.

Komoe-sensei grew even more afraid. She began to worry that what she had done had only made Index's condition worse.

"Don't worry." Index looked about ready to collapse even then. "It's like a cold. You need your own strength to get better. The wound itself has been closed up, so I'll be fine."

As soon as she said that, Index collapsed to the side. The figurine fell over, too. The tea table shook slightly and the room linked to it was assaulted by a thundering tremble.

Komoe-sensei was about to run around the tea table to Index, but Index began to sing.

When Komoe-sensei followed along and sang one last song, the strange atmosphere returned to the normal and stuffy atmosphere of the apartment. Komoe-sensei cautiously shook the tea table but nothing happened.

(Thank goodness.)

As Komoe-sensei closed her eyes in relief, Index spoke. Komoe-sensei thought that anyone would be glad to have their deadly wound healed, but the nun said something else.

"I'm glad I did not burden anyone with anything." Komoe-sensei stared at Index in surprise. "…If I had died here, he may have had to bear the burden."

Index closed her eyes as if to sleep and said nothing more. When that girl's back

was sliced, when she collapsed, and when she had performed the strange ritual, she had never once thought about herself. She had been thinking about the person who had carried her there.

Komoe-sensei could not think the same way. She had no one to think that way about. That was why she asked one thing.

She was sure Index was already asleep and would not hear her; but that was exactly why she asked it, yet the girl answered with her eyes still closed.

“I don’t know.”

She had never felt that way about anyone before, and she did not know what the feeling was. But when he had recklessly gotten mad for her when faced with that magician, she had wanted him to run away even if she had to crawl to him and force him. When he had run away from Innocentius, she had thought she would cry when he had returned.

She could not fathom it, but when she was with him, nothing ever went as she wanted and she felt pushed around.

And yet, those unexpected things were enjoyable and made her so happy. She did not recognize what the feeling was, however.

This time, Index fell into a deep sleep with a smile on her face, as if she were enjoying a pleasant dream.

Part 2

After dawn came, her symptoms were like those of a cold.

Index was bedridden with a high fever and a headache, though she lacked a runny nose or a sore throat because it was not a genuine virus. It was simply a matter of regaining her missing stamina, so no matter how many immunity-strengthening cold medicines she took, the efforts would be futile.

“…So why are you wearing only panties down below?”

Index, lying down, had a wet towel on her forehead; she apparently was unable to stand the hot dampness inside the futon and had one leg sticking out in Kamijou’s direction. She wore a pale green pajama top but her bright skin-colored thigh was sticking out up to its base. Due to her fever, the skin was a bit pink.

The towel had grown lukewarm, so Komoe-sensei stuck it into a basin of water and splashed it around while she glared at Kamijou.

“…Kamijou-chan. I think those clothes were a bit too much.”

“Those clothes” likely referred to the safety-pin-covered white nun’s habit.

Kamijou agreed with her completely about it, but Index looked like a displeased cat over having her familiar habit taken from her.

“The real question is how the pajamas of a beer-loving, heavy-smoking adult like you fit Index so perfectly. Just what is the age difference between you two anyway?”

“Wha-?”

Komoe-sensei (age unknown) was at a loss for words, but Index went in to kick her while she was down.

“Please don’t look down on me like that. These pajamas are actually a bit tight around the chest.”

“What… impossible! That can’t be right. Now you’re just making fun of me!” protested Komoe-sensei.

“Actually, do you even have anything in the chest area for it to be tight around!?” asked Kamijou.

“…”

“…”

As the two ladies glared at him, Kamijou's soul reflexively entered prostration mode.

"Right, right. By the way, Kamijou-chan, who exactly is this girl?"

"My little sister."

"That is a blatant lie. With that silver hair and those green eyes, she is clearly a foreigner!"

"She's my stepsister."

"…And you're a pervert?"

"I'm just kidding! I'm well aware that a stepsister is bad manners, but a real sister is against the rules!"

"Kamijou-chan," she said, suddenly switching over to her instructor voice.

Kamijou fell silent. It was not at all surprising that Komoe-sensei wanted to know what was going on. Not only had he brought a strange foreigner to her, but the girl had had a blade wound on her back that clearly smelled of bad news. Komoe-sensei was even forced to take part in some strange bit of magic.

It would have been difficult to ask her to turn a blind eye.

"Sensei, can I ask one thing?"

"What?"

"Are you asking so you can tell the Anti-Skill or Academy City's Board of Directors?"

"Yes," Komoe-sensei immediately said with a nod. With no hesitation, she had told her student that she would sell them out. "I do not know what kind of situation you two are in." Komoe-sensei smiled. "But if it happened here in Academy City, it is our duty as teachers to resolve it. Taking responsibility for the children is the duty of the adults. Now that I know you are in some kind of trouble, I cannot sit idly by."

That was what Tsukuyomi Komoe said, yet she had no power, no strength, and no duty to do so.

She merely said it with the straightforwardness of a famous katana slicing straight through the proper place at the proper time.

“I just…” Kamijou said before he finished under his breath. (…Can’t stand up to her.)

Kamijou had lived a long 15 or so years and yet had never seen someone else like that teacher: the type seen in dramas, not even seen in movies anymore.

And so…

“If you were a complete stranger, I wouldn’t have hesitated to get you involved, but I owe you for that magic, so I can’t let you get involved.”

Kamijou’s response was just as straightforward.

He had already had enough of seeing people who were willing to protect others for nothing in return be hurt before his eyes.

Komoe-sensei fell silent for a moment.

“Mhh. I am not going to let you get away with trying to trick me with some cool line.”

“…? Sensei, why’d you get up and head for the door?”

“I am giving this a stay of execution. I need to go to the supermarket for groceries. Kamijou-chan, you figure out exactly what it is you need to tell me in the mean time. And…”

“And?”

“I might get so caught up in shopping that I forget. No cheating when I get back. Make sure you tell me, okay?”

Kamijou thought Komoe-sensei smiled as she spoke.

With the sound of the apartment door opening and then closing, Kamijou and

Index were left alone in the room.

(She’s trying to be kind.)

From the smile of a child plotting something on her face, Kamijou had a feeling Komoe-sensei would “forget” everything once she returned from the supermarket.

If he later decided to consult her about it, she would surely act furious and say “Why didn’t you tell me sooner!? I completely forgot!” and happily agree to help.

With a sigh, Kamijou turned toward Index who lay in the futon.

“…Sorry. I know this is no time to be worried about appearances.”

“Don’t worry about it. This is for the best.” Index shook her head. “It would be wrong to get her any more involved. …And she can’t use any more magic.”

“?” Kamijou frowned.

“Grimoires are dangerous. Written in them are aberrant and uncommon knowledge as well as twisted laws that break the common laws of this world. Whether they’re for good or evil, those things are toxic in this world. Merely learning the knowledge of a ‘different world’ will destroy the brain of the one who learns it,” explained Index.

Kamijou tried to translate that in a way he understood.

(So is it like forcefully running a program that isn’t compatible with a computer’s OS?)

“My brain and spirit are protected by religious barriers, and magicians who attempt to exceed being human must exceed the boundaries of their own common knowledge to arrive at the desired state of mind that can almost be likened to a type of insanity. However, for a normal person from a barely religious country like Japan, it could all be over after just casting one more spell.”

“I-I see…” Kamijou somehow managed to stop the shock he had received from

showing. “Well, that’s a shame. I was hoping she would be able to perform alchemy for me. You know alchemy, right? It can turn lead into gold.”

He of course omitted the fact that he knew this from an item mixing RPG with a young female alchemist as its protagonist.

“Well, there is a technique for that called **Limen Magna**,[18] but preparing the tools with modern materials would cost… um… 7 trillion yen in this country’s currency.”

“……Well, that definitely isn’t worth it,” muttered Kamijou soullessly.

Index smiled weakly and said, “…Yeah. Turning lead into gold accomplishes nothing more than making nobles happy.”

“But… wait. Now that I think about it, what does that do? How does it work? If you’re turning lead into gold, are you rearranging the Pb atoms into Au?”

“I don’t really know, but it’s only a 14th Century technique.”

“Wait, do you mean what I think you mean? It might actually be changing the atomic arrangement!? You mean you could cause proton decay without a particle accelerator and nuclear fusion without a nuclear reactor!? Wait just a second. I’m not even sure the seven Level 5s of Academy City could do that!”

“???”

“Wait, don’t look so confused! Um… um… Ah. If you’re wondering just how amazing that would be, that kind of thing would let us easily create atomic robots or mobile suits!”

“What are those?”

With those three words, she cast aside all of the dreams of men.

As Kamijou’s head hung down limply, Index seemed to feel she had done something wrong.

“A-Anyway, the holy swords and magic wands used in ceremonies can be made

with modern materials as substitutes, but there is a limit. …This especially goes for sacred items related to God such as the Lance of Longinus, Joseph's Holy Grail, or **The_ROOD**.[a30] Even after 1000 years, it seems no substitutes can be made… ow…"

As she talked on and on excitedly, she began to hold her temple like she had a hangover.

Kamijou Touma looked at Index's face as she lay in the futon.

She had 103,000 grimoires in her head. Just reading one of them could drive you insane, and yet she had put each and every letter of all those books in her head. How much pain had that process caused her?

Yet she never once complained about her pain.

"Do you want to know?" she asked while ignoring her own pain as if apologizing to Kamijou.

Index's usual cheerful tone had set a context that made that quiet voice stand out and seem to hold even more determination.

(Sensei, you idiot.)

Index's situation was irrelevant to Kamijou. Whatever situation she had possibly been in, there was no way he could abandon her. As long as he could defeat her enemies and keep her safe, he saw no reason to dig into her old wounds.

"Do you want to know what my circumstances are?" repeated the girl naming herself Index.

Kamijou made up his mind and replied, "That kinda makes me feel like a priest, y'know?"

In a way, it really did. He felt like a priest listening to the confessions of a sinner.

"Do you know why?" Index asked. "The Christian Church was originally a single organization, but now there are the Catholics, the Protestants, the Roman Catholics, the Russian Orthodox, the Anglicans, the Nestorians, the Athanasians, the Gnostics, and more. Do you know why these splits occurred?"

“Well…”

Kamijou had at least skimmed through his history textbook, so he had an idea what the answer was. However, he hesitated to mention it in front of the “genuine” Index.

“That’s good enough.” Index actually smiled. “It was because politics were mixed in with the church. Sects split, opposed each other, and fought. In the end, even people who believed in the same God were each other’s enemies. Even as we believe in the same God, we each walk a different road of many scattered paths.”

Of course, people’s ideas on things naturally differed. Some wanted to make money with the word of God, while others refused to allow that. Some felt they were loved by God more than anyone else in the world, while others refused to accept that.

“After the sects stopped interacting with each other, we each underwent our own isolated development which gave us our individual characteristics. We changed in accordance to the situations or cultures of our countries.” Index let out a small breath. “The **Roman Catholic Church**[a31] manages and controls the world, the **Russian Orthodox Church**[a32] searches out and eliminates the occult, and the **Anglican Church**[a33] I belong to…”

Index’s words caught in her throat for a second.

“England is a country of magic,” she said as if that was a bitter memory. “So the Anglican Church is especially advanced in anti-magician culture and techniques as seen by witch hunts and the inquisition.”

In London alone were a number of public companies calling themselves magic cabals, and there were 10 times that many shell corporations that really only existed on paper. Their trials and errors that had begun as a means of protecting the citizens from the “evil magicians lurking in the city” had developed too far in one direction and at some point became a culture of slaughter and execution.

“The Anglican Church has a special division,” said Index as if she were confessing her own sins. “It investigates magic and develops countermeasures with which to defeat magicians. It is known as Necessarius.” She sounded

exactly like a nun.

“If you do not know your enemy, you cannot defend against their attacks. However, understanding an impure enemy will make your own heart impure, and touching an impure enemy will make your body impure. That is why Necessarius, the church of necessary evils, was created to draw all of those impurities into one place. And the most extreme case of this is…”

“The 103,000 grimoires.”

“Yes.” Index gave a small nod. “Magic is something like an equation. If you skillfully reverse the calculations, you can counteract your opponent’s attack. That is why I had these 103,000 grimoires put into me. …If you know magic from all around the world, you can neutralize magic from all around the world.”

Kamijou looked down at his right hand.

He had thought his right hand was of no use. The power of his right hand would not let him defeat even a single delinquent, would not raise his scores on tests, and would not make him popular with girls, and so he had mainly just ignored it.

But, this girl had gone through hell to achieve the same thing.

“But if these grimoires are so dangerous and you know where they are, why don’t you just burn them without reading them? As long as there are people to read and learn from these grimoires, magicians will continue to appear without end, right?”

“The actual books are less important than the contents. Even if you got rid of an **Original**,[19] the magicians who knew the contents would pass that on to their followers, so it would be pointless. Although someone who does that is known as a **sorcerer** rather than a magician,” explained Index.[20]

(Is it something like data posted on the internet? Even if you delete the original data, copy after copy of the data will continue to exist.)

“Also, a grimoire is nothing more than a textbook.” Index sounded as if she were in pain. “Just reading one does not make you a magician. Magicians change it up to suit themselves and create a new type of magic.”

It was less like data and more like a constantly changing computer virus. To completely eliminate the virus, you had to be constantly analyzing the virus and creating new antivirus software.

“As I said before, grimoires are dangerous.” Index narrowed her eyes. “When disposing just a copy, an expert **Inquisitioner**[a34] must sew his eyes shut to prevent pollution of his brain, and even then it takes 5 years of baptisms to fully rid him of the poison. The human mind cannot handle an Original. The only option for the 103,000 Originals scattered about the world is to seal them.”

It was as if she were discussing what to do with a vast collection of leftover nuclear weapons.

Actually, that was more or less what it was. Most likely, the very people who had written them had not expected this.

“Tch. But can’t magic be used by any normal person excluding us espers? Then wouldn’t this spread throughout the world in no time at all?”

Kamijou recalled Stiyl’s flames. What if everyone in the world could use that kind of power? The common knowledge of the world that built its foundation on science would crumble.

“You… don’t have to worry about that. The magic cabals do not recklessly let the grimoires get out to the general public.”

“? Why not? Wouldn’t it be better for them to have more comrades to fight for them?”

“That is exactly why. If every single person who had a gun were friends, there would be no war.”

“…”

Just because two people knew magic did not mean they were on the same side. It was because they knew the power of their trump cards that they did not want to recklessly create enemy magicians.

The grimoires were treated like the plans of a new weapon.

“Hmm. I think I get it.” Kamijou seemed deep in thought. “So basically, they want to get their hands on the bomb in your head.”

She was a library with perfect copies of the world’s 103,000 Original grimoires in her head. To obtain her was to obtain all the magic in the world.

“…Right.” From her voice, it sounded like she was about to die. “With the 103,000 grimoires, you would be able to twist everything in the world to your will without exception. That is what we call a Magic God.”

Not the god of the demon world, but someone who had thoroughly mastered magic to the point of entering the domain of god.

A Magic God.

(…Fuck that.)

Without realizing, Kamijou had begun to grit his back teeth. He could tell from how Index acted that she had not chosen to have those 103,000 grimoires put into her head. Kamijou recalled Stiyl’s flames. She lived like that for no reason other than to prevent as many victims as she could.

Kamijou could not stand how the magicians were using those feelings to their advantage and could not stand how the church referred to her as “impure”. All of them were treating a human being like a thing, and Index must have seen nothing but people who did that. The fact that she still put everyone above herself despite that was what Kamijou could stand the least.

“…Sorry.”

Kamijou had no clue what it was that made him so angry. But, that one word made him truly snap.

He lightly tapped Index on the forehead.

“…Oh, come on. Why didn’t you tell me about something this important?”

Index froze in place as Kamijou stared at that bedridden girl with his canines bared. Her eyes opened wide like she had done something horribly wrong, and her lips frantically moved like she was trying to say something.

“But, I didn’t think you would believe me, and I didn’t want to scare you. And… um…”

Index seemed about to burst into tears, and her voice grew quieter and quieter as she spoke. Kamijou could barely hear her toward the end.

Still, Kamijou heard her say “I didn’t want you to hate me.”

“No, fuck that!!” He literally heard a snapping noise. “Don’t look down on people and come up with your own estimation of them! Church secrets? 103,000 grimoires? Yeah, that stuff is amazing and incredible. And yes, it all seems so absurd that I still don’t really believe it. But…” Kamijou paused for a beat. “Is that it?”

Index’s eyes opened wide. Her small lips frantically moved as if to say something, but no words came out.

“Don’t look down on me like that. Did you really think I would call you creepy or disgusting or something just because you memorized 103,000 grimoires!? Did you think I would abandon you and run off the instant magicians showed up? Fuck that. If that were all I was capable of, I wouldn’t have taken you in the first place!”

As Kamijou spoke, he finally realized what it was he was so upset about.

Kamijou had simply wanted to be of some help to Index. He did not want to see Index get hurt anymore. That was it. And yet, she refused to let Kamijou protect her while she put herself in harm’s way to protect him. Kamijou had wanted to hear her ask for help just once.

It was frustrating for him. So very, very frustrating.

“…Just trust me a little. Don’t come up with your own estimations of people.”

That was all there was to it. Even if he had not had his right hand and had been a normal person, it would have been no reason for Kamijou to back down.

No such reason could exist.

Index merely stared at Kamijou's face in astonishment for a time. But then, tears welled up in her eyes.

It was as if her eyes were made of ice and had begun to melt.

Index clenched and sealed her lips to choke down the sobs, but her lips trembled as if she could no longer stand it. She drew the futon up to her mouth and bit onto it. If not for the blanket, the enlarged and growing tears in her eyes would have made her look like a bawling kindergartener.

In all likelihood, the tears were not merely in response to the words Kamijou had spoken.

Kamijou lacked enough conceit to think it was. He doubted his words had made that much of an impression on her. Most likely, something that had been building up within her had come flowing out with his words as the trigger.

Just as he felt his heart break at the thought of no one ever having said those words to her before, Kamijou also felt that he had finally seen Index's "weakness" which made him a bit happy.

However, Kamijou was not the kind of pervert who enjoyed watching girls cry. In fact, it was incredibly awkward.

If Komoe-sensei unknowingly entered at that moment, he was sure she would unhesitatingly tell him to die.

"U-Um… Y'see. I have my right hand, so no magician is any match for me!"

"…But… sob… you said you have supplementary lessons during summer vacation."

"…Did I say that?"

"You definitely did."

Apparently, the girl who had perfectly memorized 103,000 books had an

excellent memory.

“Don’t feel bad about throwing someone’s everyday life into disorder with something like this. My supplementary lessons aren’t that big a deal. School doesn’t want to hold me back if they can help it, so if I ditch the supplementary lessons, I can just go to supplementary lessons for the supplementary lessons. I can put them off as long as I need to.”

If Komoe-sensei had heard that, that room would likely have turned into a battlefield, but he paid that no heed.

“…”

With tears still in her eyes, Index looked up at Kamijou.

“…Then why were you in such a rush to get to your supplementary lessons?”

“……Oh.”

Kamijou thought back. Sure enough, after he had stripped her nude by destroying her Walking Church with Imagine Breaker and that closed elevator-like silence had taken over, he had…

“Because you had plans and because you had a normal life to live, I felt it was wrong to disturb all that…”

“O-Oh. Yeah…”

“I was in the way there.”

“…”

“I was in the way…”

Once she repeated herself with tears in her eyes, it was downright impossible to try to get out of it.

“I’m fwowwy!” Kamijou Touma apologized as he quickly entered prostration mode.

Index slowly sat up in the futon like a sick person, grabbed Kamijou’s ears, and

bit down on the top of his head like it was a giant onigiri.

● ● ●

About 600 meters away on top of a multi-tenant building, Stiyl took his binoculars away from his eyes.

“The boy Index is with… I’ve looked into him. …How is she?”

Without turning around, Stiyl replied to the girl who had spoken to him.

“She’s alive. But that must mean they have a magic user.”

The girl gave no response, but it seemed she was more relieved that no one had died than worried about a new enemy.

The girl was 18, but she was about a head shorter than Stiyl who was only 14.

But then, Stiyl was over 2 meters tall, so the girl was still tall when compared to the average Japanese height.

Her waist-long, black hair was tied in a ponytail, and at her waist was a sheathed Japanese sword over two meters long. It was a type known as a “command sword” that was used in Shinto rain calling ceremonies.

However, it was difficult to call her a Japanese beauty.

She wore used jeans and a white shirt. For someone reason, the left leg of her jeans was completely cut off up to the base of her thigh, the extra cloth at the bottom of her T-shirt was tied off so her midriff was visible, she wore knee high boots, and her Japanese sword was hanging down in a leather holster like a pistol.

She looked something like a sheriff from a Western who had traded their pistol for a Japanese sword.

Just like Stiyl, the perfume-smelling priest, her outfit was hardly normal.

“So who exactly is this guy, Kanzaki?”

“The thing about that is… I was unable to get much information on the boy. At the very least, it seems he’s not a magician or supernaturally powered in some other way.”

“What, are you trying to say he’s just a normal high school student?” Stiyl lit the cigarette he pulled out by staring at the tip. “Just stop. I may not look it, but I’m a magician that has fully analyzed the existing 24 runes and developed 6 new and powerful runes. This world isn’t kind enough to let a powerless amateur drive back Innocentius’s flames of judgment.”

With Index’s assistance, he had put together a plan using that help almost immediately. Plus there was that strange right hand of his. If he were a normal person in Japan, then it truly was a country of mysteries.

“True.” Kanzaki Kaori narrowed her eyes. “The real issue is that someone with that much battle ability is categorized as nothing more than a hopeless student who is prone to getting into fights.”

Academy City had a hidden side where it was an institution that mass produced espers.

Even if the organization under which Stiyl and Kanzaki operated was hiding Index’s presence, Stiyl and Kanzaki had contacted the organization known as the Five Elements Institution beforehand to get permission to enter the city. Even the magic group that was known as the greatest in the world could not remain hidden within the enemy’s field.

“Perhaps the information is being intentionally blocked. Also, Index’s wounds were magically healed. Kanzaki, do any other magical organizations exist in the Far East?”

They had decided that the boy must have had an organization other than the Five Elements Institution on his side. They mistakenly believed that this other organization was thoroughly eliminating all information on Kamijou.

“If they’re doing something in this city, the Five Elements Institution’s informants must have picked up on them.” Kanzaki closed her eyes. “We have an unknown number of enemies and no chance of backup. This is a difficult

development.”

It was all a misunderstanding. Kamijou’s Imagine Breaker had zero effect unless it was being used on supernatural powers. In other words, Academy City’s System Scan was unable to measure his power because it used machines to measure it. And so, Kamijou had the misfortune to be treated like a Level 0 despite possessing a top class right hand.

“In the worst case scenario, this could develop into a magical battle against an organization. Stiyl, I heard your runes have a fatal flaw when it comes to waterproofing.”

“I’ve already compensated for that. I laminated the runes. The same trick won’t work on me again.” Like a stage magician, he pulled out the runes that now looked almost like trading cards. “This time, I will place the barrier 2 kilometers around the area rather than just on the building. It will take 164,000 cards and the preparations will take 60 hours to complete.”

Unlike in video games, real magic took a bit more than just the chanting of a spell.

It may have seemed like it was all it took at first glance, but quite a bit of preparation was necessary behind the scenes. Stiyl’s flames were the type of thing that had instructions along the lines of “Take a silver wolf’s fang that has soaked up 10 years of moonlight and…” For this reason, Stiyl’s speed was actually that of an expert.

In short, magical battles were a matter of reading what was to come. When the battle started, you were essentially caught in the trap that was the enemy’s barrier. When defending, you had to determine what the enemy’s spell was, and find a way to turn it back at the enemy. When attacking, you had to predict what kinds of counterattacks would come and rearrange your spell accordingly. Unlike simple martial arts, you had to think 100-200 steps ahead amidst constantly changing surroundings. While savage terms like “fighting” were used, it was actually more of an intellectual battle.

For that reason, an enemy force of unknown numbers put a magician at a serious disadvantage.

“…She looks so happy,” the rune magician suddenly said as he stared 600

meters ahead without using his binoculars. “She looks so very, very happy. She always lives such a happy life.” He sounded like he was spitting out some kind of thick liquid. “How long do we have to keep ripping that to pieces?”

Kanzaki stared 600 meters ahead from behind Stiyl.

Even without using binoculars or magic, she could see clearly with her 8.0 vision. Through the window, she could see the girl angrily biting down on the boy’s head while he flailed his arms around and struggled.

“It must be a complicated feeling,” said Kanzaki like a machine. “…For someone like you who was once in that same position.”

“…I’m used to it,” replied the flame magician.

He truly had experienced that feeling many times before.

Part 3

“Bathtime♪ Bathtime♪” sang Index as she walked next to Kamijou holding a wash basin in both hands.

As if to say she was done being sick, she had changed from pajamas into her safety-pin-covered nun’s habit.

Kamijou had no idea what kind of magic trick she used, but the bloody habit was perfectly clean. He had a feeling it would tear into pieces if placed in the washing machine, so he wondered if she had taken it apart and washed each individual piece.

“Does it bother you that much? To be honest, I don’t care about the smell.”

“Are you the type that likes the smell of sweat?”

“I didn’t mean it like that!!”

After three days, she was finally well enough to head out and a bath was her first request.

Komoe-sensei's apartment lacked anything even remotely resembling a bath, so their only options were to borrow the one in the manager's room or head to the run down public bath nearby. And so, the young boy and girl were walking along a footpath at night with wash basins in hand.

"Just what era of Japanese culture are we living in?" Komoe-sensei had commented with a smile as she explained the public bath system. She let Kamijou and Index stay in her apartment without asking for details on their situation. Kamijou agreed to freeload with her because he did not want to return to his dorm that was undoubtedly being watched by the enemy.

"Touma, Touma," said Index in a muffled voice because she was lightly biting the upper arm of his shirt.

Due to her habit of biting people, it was nothing more than a gesture similar to grabbing at a person's clothes to draw their attention.

"…What?" Kamijou replied in exasperation.

That morning, Index had realized she didn't know his name, so he had introduced himself to her. In the time since then, she had to have called his name about sixty thousand times.

"Nothing. I just like calling your name for no reason." Her expression was like that of a child going to an amusement park for the first time.

Index seemed much too attached to him.

It was likely because of what had happened three days prior, but Kamijou was less happy than he was unsure how to feel about the fact that no one had ever said something that basic to Index.

"Komoe said the Japanese public bath has coffee milk. What's coffee milk? Is it like a cappuccino?"

"You're not going to find anything that elegant in a public bath. Don't get your hopes up so much," said Kamijou. "Hmm, but the giant bath might be a bit

shocking to you. In England, the cramped baths like those at a hotel are most common, right?"

"Hm? …I don't really know." Index tilted her head to the side as if she really did not know. "The first thing I remember is begin here in Japan. I don't really know how things are back in England."

"…Hmm. So that's why you speak Japanese so fluently. If you were here since you were little, then you're practically Japanese yourself."

However, the certainty that she would be safe if she escaped to the Anglican Church became less credible. He had thought she would head home, but she would actually be heading to another country that she had never seen before.

"No, no. That isn't what I meant." Index shook her head, shaking her long, silver hair back and forth. "Apparently, I was born and raised in London's St. George's Cathedral. Apparently, I only came here about a year ago."

"Apparently?" Kamijou frowned at that vague term.

"Yes. I have no memories from before about a year ago when I arrived." Index smiled.

Just like a child heading to an amusement park for the first time in her life. It was the perfection of the smile that showed Kamijou the fear and pain behind it.

"When I first woke up in a back alley, I had no idea who I was. All I knew was that I had to run away. I couldn't remember what I ate for dinner the night before, but knowledge of things like magic, the Index Librorum Prohibitorum, and Necessarius were swirling around in my mind. It was so scary…"

"Then you don't even know why you lost your memories?"

"That's right," she replied.

Kamijou knew nothing of psychology, but he knew from video games and dramas that there were two major causes of amnesia: receiving a major shock to the head or sealing a memory that your heart simply could not bear.

"God damn it…" Kamijou muttered as he looked up into the night sky.

While he did feel anger towards the magicians who would do that to a girl like her, he was mostly overcome by a sense of powerlessness.

He now knew why Index had covered for him and grown so oddly attached to him. It was simply that Kamijou just so happened to be the first person she had gotten to know after spending a year alone in the world without knowing anything.

This displeased Kamijou.

He had no idea why, but for some reason that answer truly angered him.

“Mh? Touma, are you angry?”

“No, I’m not.”

The question had caught him off guard, but Kamijou managed to feign ignorance.

“If I upset you in some way, I apologize. Touma, what’s got you so mad? Is it puberty?”

“I don’t want to hear about puberty from someone with a childlike body like yours.”

“Mh. What was that? I really do think you’re mad. Or are you only pretending to be mad to trouble me? I don’t like that side of you, Touma.”

“Hey, don’t say that when you never really liked me in the first place. I’m not expecting that kind of wonderful, love comedy-like turn of events with you.”

“…”

“Huh? …Why are you staring up at me like that… princess?”

“…”

Even when he tried to force it in the direction of a gag, Index gave no response.

(Odd. This is weird. Why is Index folding her arms, looking up at me with tears in her eyes, lightly biting her lower lip with a hurt-looking expression on her

face?)

“Touma.”

“Yes?” Kamijou responded, deciding he might as well respond since she called his name.

He had a strong foreboding of misfortune.

“I hate you.”

In that instant, Kamijou gained a good amount of experience points for the rare experience of a girl biting down on the entirety of the top of his head.

Part 4

Index headed on to the public bath alone.

Meanwhile, Kamijou trudged on toward the public bath. He had tried running after Index at first, but the angry white nun ran off like a stray cat whenever she saw him. Despite this, he would see Index’s back after walking a bit further as if she were waiting for him. After that, the cycle would repeat. She was truly like a capricious cat.

(Well, we’re headed to the same place, so we’ll meet up again eventually.)

Not to mention that he sensed impending misfortune in the form of an arrest should someone see him (seemingly) chasing a weak and helpless young British nun down a dark pathway at night like a Namahage.

“A British nun, hm?” Kamijou muttered under his breath as he walked down the dark pathway alone.

He knew that Index would be brought to the Anglican Church’s headquarters in London if he took her to one of their churches in Japan. There would be nothing left for Kamijou to do. It would all surely end with something like, “It may have

just been a short time, but thank you. I will never forget you because of my eidetic memory."

Kamijou felt something sharply stabbing inside his chest, but he had no other ideas of what to do. If Index were not brought under the Church's protection, she would continue to be chased by magicians. Also, it was unrealistic to try to follow Index to England.

They lived in different worlds, they stood in different places, and they existed in different dimensions.

Kamijou lived in the world of scientific esper powers, and she lived in the world of the magical occult.

Like land and sea, their two worlds would never cross paths.

That was all there was to it.

That was all there was to it, but it still annoyed him like a fish bone stuck in his throat.

"Huh?"

Suddenly his vainly spinning thoughts cut off.

Something was not right. Kamijou checked the time displayed on a department store's electronic billboard. It was exactly 8 PM. It would still be some time before most people were asleep, and yet, a horrible silence had fallen over the area like that of a forest's at night. A strange, out-of-place sensation hung over the area.

(Come to think of it, I haven't seen anyone since we were walking together…)

With a puzzled look, Kamijou walked further along.

And when he came to a major road with three lanes in each direction, the out-of-place feeling shifted to a full-blown sense of things being blatantly wrong.

There was no one there.

No one entered or exited the major department stores that lined the road like drinks on a convenience store rack. The footpath that usually felt overly narrow now felt horribly wide, and not a single car was driving along that runway of a road. All of the cars parked on the side of road were empty as if abandoned.

It was like a farm road out in the country.

“This is because Stiyl carved the Opila rune for a people clearing field.”

A female voice suddenly entered his head like a Japanese sword stabbing into the core of his face.

He had not noticed.

She hid behind nothing and did not sneak behind him. She stood in the center of the wide runway-like road around 10 meters ahead of him, cutting off his path.

It went beyond the point of not seeing or noticing her due to the dark. An instant before there truly was no one. But, in the time it took him to blink, the girl had appeared.

“All of the people around this area have had their focuses averted so that they avoid approaching here for whatever reason. Most are likely inside the buildings, so worry not.”

His body reacted before his mind could manage to. All of the blood in his body seemed to gather in his right hand. With rope-like pain tightly binding his wrist, Kamijou instinctually sensed that the girl was dangerous.

The girl wore a T-shirt and jeans with a leg boldly cut off, her clothes completely removed from normalcy.

However, the two meter plus Japanese sword hanging from her waist like a pistol emanated a freezing bloodlust. The blade was hidden within a scabbard but the black scabbard appeared as full of history as the pillar of an old Japanese building, making it clear that the sword was real.

“**The One who Purifies God and Slays Demons…** An excellent ‘true name.’”[21]

However, the girl herself showed no signs of nervousness. The relaxed way she spoke, like that of someone having a casual conversation, made it all the more frightening.

“…Who are you?”

“I am Kanzaki Kaori. …I would prefer to not give my other name, if possible.”

“Your other name?”

“My magic name.”

He had expected it, to a certain extent, but Kamijou still took a step back.

Magic name. That was the “killing name” that Stiyl offered before attacking Kamijou with magic.

“So… what? Are you from that magic cabal or whatever, just like Stiyl?”

“…?” For a split second, Kanzaki frowned in doubt. “Oh, did you hear that from Index?”

Kamijou gave no reply.

A magic cabal, the organization chasing Index to acquire her 103,000 grimoires, a group striving to become magic gods, people who had so thoroughly mastered magic that they could twist everything in the world to their will.

“To be honest,” Kanzaki closed one eye. “I would like to take her into our care without having to give my magic name.”

Kamijou shuddered. Kamijou had a trump card, his right hand, and yet, the enemy standing before him sent a chill down his back.

“…And if I refuse?” Kamijou asked nevertheless. He had no reason to fall back.

“Then I will have no choice.” Kanzaki closed her other eye. “I will have to give my name until she has been brought into our care.”

An earthquake-like shock caused the ground under Kamijou’s feet to tremble.

It was like a bomb had gone off. The night sky at the edge of his vision that should have been covered in the pale blue darkness was instead colored with a burning orange like that of the sunset. Giant flames were spreading a few hundred meters ahead.

“Index…!!”

The enemy was an organization and Kamijou knew the name of a flame

magician.

Kamijou reflexively looked over in the direction of the exploding flames and in that instant, Kanzaki Kaori's slicing attack approached him.

A distance of 10 meters lay between Kamijou and Kanzaki. Additionally, Kanzaki's katana surpassed two meters long, so it looked impossible for her slender feminine arms to pull it from its scabbard, much less swing it around.

…But that was just how it looked.

In the next instant, the air above Kamijou's head was sliced apart like she wielded a giant laser. In shock, he froze in place and the blade of a wind turbine behind him to the right was silently sliced through diagonally as if it were made of butter.

"Please stop this," said a voice 10 meters in front of him. "Ignoring my warnings will only lead to death."

Kanzaki's two meters plus sword was already in the scabbard. The strike had been so quick Kamijou had never even seen the blade exposed in the air. He was unable to move.

The only reason he was still standing was because Kanzaki had intentionally missed. The situation seemed so unreal that he had only just barely managed to realize that fact. His enemy was so absurdly powerful that his mind could not keep up.

With a loud thud, the sliced wind turbine blade fell to the ground behind him.

Though the wreckage of the blade fell so closely by, Kamijou was still unable to move.

"…!"

Kamijou gritted his teeth at the thought of how ridiculously sharp that blade must have been.

Kanzaki opened one of her closed eyes and said, "I will ask you again." She narrowed her eyes slightly. "I would like to take her into our care without having

to give my magic name.”

Kanzaki’s voice was unhesitant, her voice so cold she seemed to be saying that that level of destruction was not worth any surprise.

“…Wh-What the hell are you saying?”

As if his feet were glued to the ground, he could move neither forwards nor backwards. His legs trembled like he had just finished running a full marathon and could feel his strength leaving them.

“I have no reason to surrender to-…”

“I will ask as many times as necessary.”

In an instant —truly only an instant— Kanzaki’s right hand blurred and disappeared like a bug in a video game.

With a roar, something flew at Kamijou with frightening speed.

“!?”

Kamijou felt like giant laser guns were being fired from all directions.

It was like a giant tornado made up of blades of air.

Kamijou Touma watched as that typhoon sliced the asphalt, the streetlights, and the trees lining the street at set intervals to pieces as if it were an industrial water jet cutter. A fist-sized piece of asphalt flew through the air and struck Kamijou’s right shoulder, which was enough to send him flying and almost knock him unconscious.

Grasping his right shoulder, Kamijou looked around while moving only his eyes.

One… two… three, four, five, six, seven. A total of seven linear sword slices continued for a few dozen meters across the flat ground. The cuts came in at many seemingly random angles and looked something like fingernail scratches on a steel door.

He heard a click as her katana returned to its scabbard.

“I would like to take her into our care without having to give my magic name.”

With her right hand still on the hilt of her sword, Kanzaki simply spoke her words with no malice or anger.

Seven strikes, but Kamijou was unable to see even a single one. She had performed seven iai strikes in that single instant. And, had she wanted to, any or all of those seven strikes could have been a deadly attack that sliced Kamijou in two.

No. He had only heard the metallic sound of the sword being sheathed once.

It was most likely the supernatural power known as magic. She possessed some magic that extended the range of her strikes by dozens of meters and gave her the swordsmanship to attack seven times with one draw.

“The speed of the **Nanasen** attack[22] that my **Shichiten Shichitou**[23] creates is enough to kill you seven times over in the period of time known as an instant. People refer to this as an instant kill. Calling this a certain kill would not be far from the truth.”

Silently, Kamijou clenched his fist with enough force to crush his right hand.

She had overwhelming speed, power, and range. Most likely, that slicing attack had something to do with the supernatural power known as magic. In that case, he just had to touch the actual attack itself.

“Keep dreaming,” she said, cutting off his thoughts. “I heard from Stiyl that your right hand can dispel magic for some reason. However, am I correct in thinking you cannot do so unless you touch it with that right hand of yours?”

Exactly. Kamijou’s right hand was of no use if he could not touch it.

It was not just an issue of speed. Unlike Misaka Mikoto’s Biri Biri-ing and Railgun that shot in a straight line, he could not predict where Kanzaki Kaori’s Nanasen would go due to its constant changing. If Kamijou tried to use Imagine Breaker, those seven slices would likely slice his arm to pieces right off the bat.

“I will ask as many times as it takes.”

Kanzaki's right hand silently grabbed the hilt of Shichiten Shichitou at her waist.

Kamijou felt a cold sweat on his cheek.

If Kanzaki's mood changed and she went in for the kill, Kamijou would certainly be sliced to pieces in an instant. Given how she had sliced the trees lining the road to pieces at a range of a few dozen meters, trying to run away or use something as a shield would be suicide.

Kamijou calculated the distance between himself and Kanzaki.

It was about 10 meters. If he ran as quickly as his physical body would let him, he could cover that distance in four steps.

(…Move.)

Kamijou desperately commanded his legs that seemed attached to the ground with instant glue.

"Will you let us take her into our care before I give my magic name?"

(…Move!!)

He took one step forward as if ripping his feet off of the ground. One of Kanzaki's eyebrows twitched up as Kamijou moved to take another explosive step forward like a bullet.

"Ohh…. Ohhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

He took his next step. If he could not run away, could not evade to the right or left, and could not use anything as a shield, the only option left was to head forward and open up a path for himself.

"I do not know what is driving you this far, but…"

Kanzaki gave a sigh that held more pity than surprise. And then…

Nanasen.

The small fragments of the destroyed asphalt and trees floated in the air like dust. With a roar of wind, that cloud of dust was sliced to pieces before

Kamijou’s eyes.

“Ah… Ohh!!”

He knew in his head that he could negate it if he touched it with his right hand, but his heart immediately chose to evade. He crouched down with such force it looked like he was swinging his head down, and his heart froze as the seven waves passed overhead.

He had not calculated it, and there was no way he could have succeeded had he tried. He had only managed to evade due to pure luck, and he proceeded to take another powerful step, the third of the four.

No matter how strange of an attack Nanasen was, it was still an **iai** strike at its base.[24] It was an ancient sword technique that let fly a single definitive attack that began with the action of sliding the sword from its scabbard, meaning that the time when the blade was out of its scabbard left the user defenseless and unable to use another iai strike.

If he took that last step to reach Kanzaki, he would win. The final hope that the thought gave Kamijou was shattered to pieces with a small click.

It was the much-too-short slightly metallic noise of the katana being returned to its scabbard.

Nanasen.

The roar came from directly in front of Kamijou at pointblank range.

The seven strikes were on him before his body’s reflexes could even kick in.

“Dammit… Ahhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

Kamijou stuck his right fist forward toward the slicing attacks in front of him, but the movement was more like a defensive attempt at catching a ball thrown at his face than an offensive attack.

As long as it was a supernatural power, Kamijou’s right hand could negate it even if it were the power of God or of vampires.

Due to the close proximity, the seven strikes were released simultaneously without spread, which meant he could blow away all seven of them with one strike of Imagine Breaker.

As the strikes glowed blue in the moonlight, the skin of one finger on Kamijou's fist lightly touched them….

…And was eaten into.

"Wha…!?"

It did not disappear. Even with Imagine Breaker, those absurd strikes did not disappear.

Kamijou immediately tried to pull his hand back but was too slow. After all, he had stuck his own hand into the oncoming strike of a Japanese sword.

She narrowed her eyes slightly at the sight of him. In the next instant, the wet sound of flesh being sliced apart filled the area. Kamijou held his bloody right hand with his left and fell to his knees.

He was honestly surprised to find all five of his fingers were still attached. This was of course not due to Kamijou's fingers being tough or Kanzaki's skill being poor. Kamijou's body was not sliced to pieces due to the simple fact that she had held back, held back even more, and allowed him to live.

Still on his knees, Kamijou looked up.

Kanzaki stood with the blue moon's perfect circle behind her. He could see things like red threads in front of her.

It was akin to a spider web. It was only once Kamijou's blood covered them like evening dew on a spider web that he could see the seven steel wires.

"I can't believe this…" Kamijou clenched his teeth. "Are you even a magician?"

The ridiculously huge katana was nothing but a decoration.

It was unsurprising that he was unable to see the instant she drew the sword. Kanzaki had never actually drawn it. She had only moved the sword slightly

within the scabbard and then moved it back. That motion was to hide the hand manipulating the seven wires.

Kamijou's hand was relatively unharmed because Kanzaki had loosened the wires just before they severed his fingers.

"As I said, I heard about your ability from Stiyl." Kanzaki sounded disinterested. "That was when I realized: your power is not of greater quantity, it is of a different type. It is the same as rock-paper-scissors. No matter how many times you use rock, you can never defeat my paper."

"…"

Kamijou clenched his bloody fist.

"You seem mistaken about something." It seemed to pain Kanzaki to look at him. "I am not disguising a lack of ability with a cheap trick. Shichiten Shichitou is not a mere decoration. Beyond Nanasen is the true **Yuisen**."[25]

"…"

He clenched his bloody fist.

"And more importantly, I have not given my magic name yet."

"…"

He clenched it.

"Please do not make me give it, boy." Kanzaki bit her lip. "I don't wish to give it ever again."

His clenched fist trembled. She was clearly different from Stiyl. She was not a simple one-trick pony. From the most basic of the basics to the most complex of the complexities, she was a kind completely differently from Kamijou.

"…Like I can give up."

Even so, Kamijou did not unclench his fist. He kept his right hand closed despite having no feeling in it.

Index had not given up in her attempt to face Kamijou when sliced in the back by that magician.

“What did you say? …I could not hear you.”

“I said shut the hell up, you damn robot!!”

Kamijou clenched his bloody fist and tried to swing it at the face of the girl standing before him.

But, the toe of Kanzaki’s boot jabbed into his solar plexus before he could. All the air in his lungs burst from his mouth and the Shichiten Shichitou’s black scabbard struck him on the side of the face like a baseball bat. His body spun like a tornado, and he struck the ground shoulder-first.

Before he could cry out in pain, Kamijou saw the bottom of a boot coming down to crush his head.

In an attempt to evade, he immediately rolled to the side and…

“Nanasen.”

As that term entered Kamijou’s ears, seven slicing attacks broke the asphalt around him to pieces. Kamijou’s entire body was pelted by an explosion of small fragments from every direction.

“Gh… Ah…!?”

Kamijou writhed in place as intense pain similar to being brutalized by five or six people assaulted him. Kanzaki approached him with her boots scraping on the ground.

(I need to get up…)

However, his legs were too tired to move.

“Surely that is enough.” Her quiet voice actually sounded pained. “There is no reason for you to go this far for her. Lasting even 30 seconds against one of the top 10 magicians in London is quite an achievement. She cannot blame you after going this far.”

“…”

Kamijou’s mind was hazy, but he managed to recall something.

He recalled that Index would indeed not blame him no matter what he did.

(But…)

He could not give up precisely because she continued to withstand it all without blaming others. He wanted to save the girl who smiled so perfectly with the otherwise heartbreaking expression.

Kamijou forced his destroyed right hand into a fist like it was a dying bug.

His body could still move. It moved when asked.

“…Why?” Kamijou whispered from his collapsed position on the ground. “You look like you don’t like this. You aren’t like that Stiyl guy; you’re hesitating to kill your enemy. You could easily have killed me from the beginning if you wanted to, but you didn’t. …You still have enough of a normal human’s way of thinking to hesitate about things like that, don’t you?”

Kanzaki had asked again and again. She had asked to have it all ended before she had to give her magic name.

The runic magician naming himself Stiyl Magnus had not shown the slightest bit of hesitation in that regard.

“…”

Kanzaki Kaori fell silent, but Kamijou’s mind was too hazy from the pain to notice.

“Then surely you know, right? You know that chasing a girl around until she collapses from hunger and then slicing her back open with a sword is wrong, right?” As he spoke the words as if he were coughing up blood, Kanzaki could only continue to listen. “Did you know that she has no memories beyond about a year ago thanks to you? What the hell did you do to her while chasing her down to cause something like that?”

He received no response. Kamijou could not understand.

He would have understood if this magician were trying to gain the 103,000 grimoires to become a magic god that could (supposedly) bend the rules of the world in order to make some wishes like healing a child with an incurable disease or something for a dead lover come true.

But she was not doing that.

She was part of an organization. She was doing it because she had been told to, because it was her job, and because those were her orders. That was all it had taken for her to chase down a girl and slice her back open.

“Why?” repeated Kamijou, his teeth clenched. “I’m a loser who couldn’t save a single girl after risking my life to desperately fight you. I’m a weakling who can’t do anything but lie on the ground and watch you take her away.” He sounded like he could burst into tears like a child at any moment.

“But you’re different, aren’t you?” He had no idea what he was saying. “With your power, you could protect anyone or anything, and save anything or anyone.” He had no idea who he was speaking to.

“So why are you doing this?”

He spoke.

He regretted.

He regretted that he had thought he could protect everything he wanted with the little power he had.

He regretted that someone with such overwhelming power was using it only to hunt down a small girl.

He regretted that the situation seemed to be saying that he was worse than even someone like that.

He regretted it all and he thought he would cry.

“…”

Silence built atop silence, creating an even greater silence.

Had Kamijou's mind been clearer, he would definitely have been surprised.

"…I…"

Kanzaki was the one driven into a corner.

With only a few words, he had driven one of the top 10 magicians in London into a corner.

"I really did not mean to slice her back open. I thought the barrier of her Walking Church habit was still functioning… I only sliced her because I was absolutely sure it would not hurt her… And yet…"

Kamijou did not understand what Kanzaki was saying.

"I am not doing this because I want to," said Kanzaki. "But she cannot live if I do not do this. …She will… die."

Kanzaki sounded like a child, about to burst into tears.

"The organization I belong to is the same as hers. I am from Necessarius of the Anglican Church," she said as if coughing up blood. "She is my colleague… and my precious friend."

Chapter 3: The Grimoire Peacefully Smiles.
"Forget_me_not."

Part 1

He did not understand. He did not understand what she was saying.

While Kamijou lay collapsed and bloody on the road looking up at Kanzaki, he thought he had imagined what he had heard because of the surprise. After all, it made no sense. Index was trying to escape to the Anglican Church while being chased by magicians. How could those magicians be from that very same Anglican Church?

“Have you ever heard of an eidetic memory?” asked Kanzaki Kaori. Her voice was weak and she looked pained. At that moment, it was hard to believe she was one of the top 10 magicians in London. She looked like nothing more than an exhausted girl.

“Yes, that’s the true identity of her 103,000 grimoires, right?” Kamijou moved his split lips. “They’re all in her head. I find it hard to believe she can remember every single thing she sees even once, though. I mean, she’s an idiot. She just doesn’t look like that kind of genius.”

“…What does she look like to you?”

“Just a girl.”

Kanzaki looked more exhausted than surprised and said, “Do you think she could have escaped our pursuit for an entire year if she were ‘just a girl?’”

“…”

“Stiyl has his flames and I have my Nanasen and Yuisen. She is up against magicians who name their magic names, but she cannot rely on a supernatural power like you or magic like me. She can only run away.” Kanzaki gave a self-derisive smile. “And Stiyl and I are only two opponents. Not even I would last a month against the entire organization of Necessarius.”

That was true.

Kamijou finally learned the truth about Index. He was unable to escape for four days even with his Imagine Breaker that could smash the systems of God in a single strike. And yet, she…

“She is, without a doubt, a genius,” declared Kanzaki. “To the extent that using her ability in the wrong way could cause a disaster.[26] The reason why the higher ups in the Church do not treat her normally is clear. They are afraid of her. Everyone is.”

“That may be.” Kamijou bit his bloody lip. “But she’s still human. She’s not a tool. I can’t… let you call her that…!”

“Yes.” Kanzaki nodded. “But her current traits are not that different from normal people like us.”

“…?”

“Over 85 percent of Index’s brain is filled with the 103,000 grimoires. The remaining 15 percent is just barely managing to function enough for her to be the same as us.”

That was amazing and all, but there was something Kamijou wanted to know first.

“…So what? What are you people doing? You’re part of the same Church as Index, right? That Necessarius thing. Why are you chasing her around? Why was Index saying you were evil magicians from a magic cabal?” Kamijou silently clenched his back teeth. “Or are you trying to say Index was the one tricking me?”

He could not believe that. If she were simply trying to use Kamijou, he saw no reason why she would have risked her life and gotten her back sliced open to

save him. And, even without the logical reasoning, he simply did not want to believe it.

"…She was not lying," replied Kanzaki Kaori after slight hesitation.

She sounded like she was holding her breath while her heart was being crushed. "She remembers nothing. She remembers neither our Necessarius affiliation nor the reason for her being chased. Because she does not remember, she has to use her knowledge to fill in the gaps. It is only natural to assume magicians chasing the Index Librorum Prohibitorum are from a magic cabal after her 103,000 grimoires."

Kamijou recalled something: Index had lost her memories from before about a year ago.

"But, wait. Wait a second. That doesn't make sense. Index has an eidetic memory, right? So why did she forget? What made her lose her memories?"

"She did not lose them." Kanzaki stopped even breathing. "Technically, I erased them."

Kamijou had no need to even ask how.

–Please do not make me give it, boy.

–I do not want to give it ever again.

"…Why?" He asked instead. "Why!? I thought you were Index's comrade! And that wasn't just something Index thought, I can tell from your face! You saw Index as a precious comrade, didn't you!? So why!?"

Kamijou recalled the smile Index had given him.

It was the other side of the loneliness that had led to him being the only person in the world that she knew.

"…We had to do it."

"Why!?" he shouted as if he were howling at the moon above his head.

“Because, otherwise, Index would have died.”

His breathing stopped. For no discernible reason, the heat of the midsummer night that he felt on his skin departed. All five of his senses grew thin like they were trying to escape reality.

It felt as if… It felt as if he were a corpse.

“Like I said, 85 percent of her brain is taken up by the memories of the 103,000 grimoires.” Kanzaki’s shoulders trembled slightly. “She only has the remaining 15 percent for normal use. If she continues to amass memories like a normal person, her brain will quickly burst.”

“No way…”

Denial. Rather than use logic or reason, Kamijou’s brain simply denied it.

“I mean… I mean… how could that be? You said she was the same as us with that 15 percent...”

“Yes, but she is different than us in one way. She has an eidetic memory.” All feeling slowly left Kanzaki’s voice.

“Think back to what an eidetic memory really is.”

“…It’s the ability to never forget anything you see even once, right?”

“And is the ability to forget really all that bad a thing?”

“…”

“The specifications of the human brain are surprisingly limited. The only reason a human brain can keep functioning for 100 years is because unneeded memories are disposed of by the process of forgetting. For example, you don’t remember what you ate for dinner a week ago, do you? Everyone’s brain undergoes this maintenance without them even realizing it. Otherwise, people would be unable to live. But,” Kanzaki said with an icy voice, “She cannot do this.”

“…”

“She cannot forget anything: be it the number of leaves on the trees lining the road, the faces of each and every person during a rush hour, or the shape of each and every raindrop falling from the sky. All of those pointless, garbage memories fill up her mind in no time.” Kanzaki’s voice froze over. “Having only 15 percent of her brain leftover is a fatal tragedy for her. Since she cannot forget on her own, her only way to live is to get another to force her to forget.”

Kamijou’s mind shattered to pieces.

(What… what kind of story is this? I thought this was the story of an uninteresting guy saving an unfortunate girl being chased by evil magicians, getting to know the girl, and finally feeling a slight twinge in his chest as he watches the girl leave in the end.)

He continued to analyze the disparities.

–So I came to shelter her before anyone who would use them came to take her away.

–I would like to take her into our care without having to give my magic name.

“…How long?” Kamijou asked.

Inquiring instead of denying, he seemingly accepted it somewhere deep down.

“How long until her brain bursts?”

“Her memories are erased at precise one year intervals.” Kanzaki sounded exhausted. “The limit is three days from now. It cannot be done too soon or too late. If not done at that exact time, her memories cannot be erased. …I hope she has yet to experience the powerful headaches that precede it.”

Kamijou was shocked. It was true Index had said she had lost her memories from over about a year ago.

…And the headaches. Kamijou had assumed Index had collapsed due to the recovery magic. After all, Index knew the most about magic out of any of them and had said as much.

But, what if Index were mistaken? Kamijou considered.

What if she were moving around in a state where her mind could be destroyed at any moment?

“Now do you understand?” Kanzaki Kaori asked. She had no tears, as if refusing to allow herself to display such cheap expressions. “We wish her no harm. In fact, there is no way to save her without us. So, will you hand her over before I must give my magic name?”

“…”

As Index’s face appeared in Kamijou’s mind’s eye, he gritted his teeth and clenched his eyes shut.

“Also, if we erase her memories she will not remember you. You saw how she viewed us, did you not? No matter how she feels about you now, once she opens her eyes, you will be seen as nothing more than a natural enemy after her 103,000 grimoires.”

“…”

At that instant, Kamijou felt something was strange.

“Saving her will gain you nothing.”

“…What do you mean by that?” The feeling exploded out in an instant like gasoline thrown on fire. “To hell with that! What does remembering me have to do with it!? You don’t seem to get it, so let me tell you something. I’m Index’s comrade. I decided to stay on her side no matter what happens! Even if it isn’t written in your precious Bible, this will never change!!”

“…”

“I thought something was off. If she only forgot, couldn’t you just get rid of the misunderstandings by explaining it all to her? Why did you leave it at the status quo? Why did you chase her around like her enemy!? Why the hell did you just decide to abandon her!? Do you have any idea how she fee-…”

“Shut up! You know nothing!!”

Kamijou’s anger was crushed by Kanzaki’s yell assaulting him from above.

What seemed to squeeze at Kamijou's heart were, rather than the words she spoke, the raw feelings that were stripped bare.

"Don't act like you understand!! How do you think we've felt erasing her feelings all this time!? How could you possibly understand!? You spoke like Stiyl was some kind of sadistic murderer, but do you know how he felt seeing her with you!? Do you know how he suffered!? Do you know how hard it was for him to name himself her enemy!? What do you understand about Stiyl's feelings as he continued to sully himself for the sake of his precious comrade!?"

"Wha-…?"

Before he could raise his voice in shock at her sudden change of behavior, Kanzaki kicked his side like a soccer ball. The unrestrained strike sent Kamijou's body into the air. After landing, he rolled two or three meters further.

The taste of blood overflowed from his stomach up into his mouth.

However, Kanzaki jumped straight up, the moon at her back, before Kamijou could even writhe about in intense pain.

Like some kind of joke, she jumped three meters up into the air with just the strength of her legs.

"…!?"

He heard a dull noise. The flat tip of Shichiten Shichitou's scabbard had crushed Kamijou's arm like high heels.

But, he failed to even cry out in pain. The expression on Kanzaki's face made it seem like she would shed tears of blood.

Kamijou feared.

He was not afraid of Nanasen, or Yuisen, or of the power of one the top 10 magicians in London. He feared the raw human emotions that assaulted him.

"We tried, too! We tried everything we could! We spent spring trying, we spent summer trying, we spent fall trying, and we spent winter trying! We promised to make memories that she would never forget and we made journals and photo

albums!”

The end of the scabbard rained down again and again like a sewing machine.

His legs, his arms, his gut, his chest, his face. The blunt blows crushed his body again and again.

“…But none of them worked.”

Kamijou heard the sound of her gritting teeth. Her hand stopped.

“Even when we showed her the journals and the photo albums, she just apologized. No matter what we did and no matter how many times we tried, even if we remade the memories from scratch, nothing worked. Everything returned to zero whether you were family, her friend, or her lover.” She trembled so much that it seemed she could not take another step. “We… could stand it no longer. We could not bear to see that smile of hers any longer.”

With Index’s personality, having to say farewell must have been as painful as dying. Having to experience such a thing over and over again would be like living in hell.

Immediately after experiencing the misfortune that was the farewell, she would forget it all and tragically begin a run toward that same determined misfortune once more.

That was why Kanzaki and Stiyl had chosen to lessen the misfortune as much as possible rather than give her the cruel fortune of knowing them. If Index never had the precious memories she had to lose, then the shock of losing her memories would lessen. That was why they abandoned their good friend and played the part of an enemy.

They would blot out her memories to make that final hell as easy as possible for her.

“…”

Somehow or other, Kamijou understood.

They were expert magicians. They made the impossible possible. The entire time

Index repeatedly lost her memories, they had to have searched for a way to keep her from losing her memories.

They never succeeded.

Even then, Index had certainly never blamed Stiyl or Kanzaki.

She had surely given them that same smile like usual.

Being forced to connect with her anew each time had led Kanzaki and Stiyl to blame themselves and see giving up as the only option.

But that was…

“To hell with that!” Kamijou gritted his teeth. “That reasoning only takes you into account. You didn’t give even a single thought about Index! Don’t blame your cowardice on her!!”

For the past year, Index had continued to flee on her own without relying on anyone. Kamijou refused to accept that that was the best option. He would not let himself accept it. He did not want to.

“Then… what else are we supposed to do!?”

Kanzaki grabbed Shichiten Shichitou’s scabbard and swung it down forcefully at Kamijou’s face.

Kamijou moved his battered right hand and grabbed the scabbard just before it struck his face.

No longer did he feel fear or nervousness because of the magician.

His body moved. It moved!

“If you were a little stronger…” Kamijou gritted his teeth. “If you had used fox words powerful enough to become reality…! If she was afraid of losing her memories of that year, you just have to give her even better memories the next year! If happiness, great enough to erase her fears of memory loss, awaited her, she wouldn’t have to keep running! That’s all it would have taken!!”

He forcibly moved his left arm, now with a broken shoulder, and grabbed the scabbard with that hand too. He forced his battered body into a standing position. Blood flowed from various parts of his body.

“Are you seriously thinking of fighting in that state?”

“…Shut… up.”

“What will you gain by fighting?” Kanzaki seemed legitimately confused. “Even if you did defeat me, Necessarius awaits behind me. I may have said I was one of the top 10 magicians in London, but there are those stronger than me. …From the Church’s point of view, I am nothing more than a subordinate sent out to this Far East island nation.”

It was likely true.

If they were truly Index’s comrades, they would have opposed the church’s way of treating her like a tool. The fact that they did not meant that there was a gap of power preventing it.

“I said… shut up!!”

It did not matter. He forced his body to move despite the fact it trembled as if he were about to die and glared at Kanzaki standing before him.

It was a simple gaze that held little power but was enough to make one of the top 10 magicians in London take a step back.

“That doesn’t matter! Do you resign yourself to protecting people because you happen to have strength!?” Kamijou took a step forward with his battered legs. “No, you don’t, do you!? Don’t lie! You worked to gain power because there was something you wanted to protect!”

He grabbed Kanzaki’s collar with his battered left hand.

“Why did you acquire power?”

He made a bloody fist with his battered right hand.

“Who did you want to protect!?”

Using that weak fist, he struck Kanzaki's face. There lacked anything remotely resembling force behind the punch and the fist itself actually spurted blood like a tomato.

Even so, Kanzaki stumbled back as if truly punched. She released Shichiten Shichitou which spiraled as it fell to the ground.

"Then what the hell are you doing here!?" He looked down on Kanzaki, who had collapsed to the ground. "If you have so much strength… if you have so much almighty power, then why are you so powerless?"

The ground shook, or so it seemed, under Kamijou. The next instant, he collapsed to the ground like the electricity powering his body had switched off.

(Get… up… The counterattack… is coming…)

His vision was dyed in darkness.

Kamijou, forcibly moving his body, had lost too much blood to see or recover. He moved in an attempt to defend against Kanzaki's counterattack but the best he could manage was move one fingertip like a caterpillar.

However, no counterattack came.

Nothing.

Part 2

The feverish heat and dryness in Kamijou's throat awoke him.

"Touma?"

Around the time that he realized he was in Komoe-sensei's apartment, he also realized Index was staring down at him as he lay in a futon.

Surprisingly, he saw bright sunlight coming in through the window. That night,

Kamijou had indeed lost to Kanzaki and lost consciousness before his enemy. He had no memory between then and waking up there.

Simply put, he was too dissatisfied with what had happened to even be glad to be alive. Komoe-sensei was nowhere to be seen and must have been out somewhere.

The only sign of her was some porridge sitting on the tea table next to Index. It may have been unfair to Index, but he doubted she could have cooked it given that she had asked for food after getting caught on his balcony and assumed Komoe-sensei had made the porridge.

“Honestly… You’re treating me like I’m sick.” Kamijou tried to move. “Ow, ow. What the hell? Since the sun’s up, I must have been out all night. What time is it?”

“It wasn’t just all night,” replied Index, whose words seemed to catch a bit in her throat.

“?”

Kamijou raised an eyebrow, and Index said, “It’s been three days.”

“Three days… Wait, what!? Why was I asleep for so long!?”

“I don’t know!!” Index suddenly shouted.

Kamijou’s breath caught in his throat at that shout that had seemed like a burst of anger.

“I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know! I really didn’t know anything! I was so focused on losing the flame magician that was at your house that I never gave any thought to the possibility that you would have to fight another magician!”

Her angry words were not aimed at Kamijou. Her voice tore into herself and Kamijou was so overwhelmed he could not interject.

“Touma, Komoe said you were collapsed in the middle of the road. She was the one that carried you back to the apartment. I was so delighted back then. I had no idea you were on the verge of death while I did nothing but delight in the

thought that we had gotten away from that stupid magician!”

Index’s words suddenly cut off. What followed was a slight gap just long enough for her to slowly breathe in and prepare for the main point of her rant.

“…I couldn’t save you, Touma.”

Unmoving and biting her lower lip, Index’s small shoulders trembled as she sat. Even so, Index shed no tears for herself.

Her heart would not allow even the slightest bit of sentiment or sympathy. Kamijou realized he could offer no words of consolation to someone who had sworn not to show any tears for even herself.

Instead, he considered something else.

Three days.

They could have attacked any number of times had they wanted to. In fact, it would have been unsurprising if they had retrieved Index three days ago when Kamijou had collapsed.

Then why? In his mind’s eye, Kamijou had a puzzled look. He could not tell what their enemy was thinking.

He also felt that the term “three days” held some deeper meaning. With the sensation of bugs swarming his back, Kamijou suddenly recalled something.

The time limit!

“? Touma, what is it?”

Index merely looked at Kamijou in puzzlement. If she knew him, the magicians had yet to erase her memories. Also, from how she was acting, the symptoms had not begun either.

Kamijou felt relieved but also wanted to kill himself for wasting the final, precious three days. However, he hid it all away in his chest, not wanting Index to know.

“…Damn it. I can’t move. What the hell? Why am I completely wrapped in bandages?”

“Does it hurt?”

“Does it hurt? If it did, I’d be writhing around. What’s with the bandages all over me? Don’t you think you went a bit overboard?”

“…”

Index said nothing, and then tears welled up in her eyes as if she were unable to bear it any longer.

It stabbed into Kamijou’s heart more than anything she could have shouted at him. He then realized that not feeling any pain was actually a bad thing.

Komoe-sensei could not use recovery magic anymore. He was pretty sure Index had said that. It would have been faster if he could have healed his wounds at the cost of some MP like in an RPG, but it seemed the world was not that kind.

Kamijou looked at his right hand. His utterly destroyed right hand was wrapped in bandages.

“Come to think of it, an esper that’s been through the Curriculum can’t use magic, right? What a pain.”

“…Right. The pathways are different between a normal person and an esper,” said the girl in an unsure tone. “It does seem those bandages will heal the wound… but your science sure is inconvenient. Our magic would be faster.”

“That may be so, but I’ll be fine without using anything like magic.”

“…What do you mean by ‘anything like’?” Index pouted her lips grumpily at Kamijou’s comment. “Touma, do you still not believe in magic? You’re as stubborn as someone with unrequited love.”

“I didn’t mean it like that.” Kamijou shook his head with it still pressed against the pillow. “If at all possible, I don’t want to see that face of yours when you talk about magic.”

Kamijou recalled the look on her face when she gave her explanation of rune magic in the passageway of his dorm. Her eyes were as cold as the pale full moon and as precise as the gears of a clock.

Her words were more proper than that of a bus tour guide's, and yet, lacking more humanity than a bank ATM. It was the existence known as Index Librorum Prohibitorum, the grimoire library.

Even so, he could not believe she was the same as the girl sitting before him. Or rather, he did not want to believe it.

"? Touma, do you dislike explanations?"

"Hah…? Wait, do you not remember? You were talking about runes in front of Stiyl like some kind of puppet. To be honest, I didn't really like it."

"…Um… Oh, I see. I… awakened again."

"Awakened?"

The way she stated it had it seem as if that puppet-like form were her true self. It was like the kind girl before him was a fake form.

"Yes, but please don't say too much about what I'm like when I awaken."

Kamijou was unable to ask why. Before he could say anything, Index said, "Speaking when you aren't conscious is something like talking in your sleep. It's embarrassing. Also," she said. "It seems I become more and more like a cold machine and that scares me."

Index smiled.

She smiled as if she were actually about to collapse but wanted to avoid worrying anyone.

It was an expression that no machine could make.

It was the smile of a human being.

“…Sorry.” Kamijou simply apologized. He regretted thinking for even a moment that she was anything other than human.

“It’s fine, you idiot.” Her comment that made it unclear if it were fine or not was accompanied by a small smile.

“Are you hungry? We have porridge, fruit, and snacks, a full course staple for the sick.”

“How am I supposed to eat with my hand-…”

He trailed off when he realized Index held chopsticks in her right fist.

“…Um, Index-san?”

“Hm? It’s too late to start worrying about it now. If I didn’t feed you like this, you would have starved to death the past three days.”

“…Okay, fine. Just give me some time to think, God.”

“Why? Are you not hungry?” Index put down the chopsticks. “Do you need me to wash you?”

“……Um?” An indescribable feeling crept through Kamijou’s body.

(Huh? What is this terribly bad feeling? What is this horrible uneasiness that’s making me think seeing a video of the past three days would make me die of embarrassment?)

“…Okay, I doubt you meant any harm by it, but just go sit over there, Index.”

“?” Index fell silent before saying, “But I am sitting down.”

“…”

Index surely had the best of intentions as she sat there with a towel, but Kamijou found himself unable to attach the term “innocent” to it.

“What is it?”

“Oh…” Kamijou had fallen silent, and now he tried to change the subject. “I was thinking about how you look from here in this futon.”

“Do I look weird? I am a nun; I can nurse people.”

He did not, in fact, believe she appeared odd. Her pure white nun’s habit and motherly behavior made her seem like an actual nun (a fact he insultingly found surprising).

And, more importantly…

The way she looked at him with those teary eyes and flushed cheeks from having cried, she seemed quite…

But for some reason, he just could not bear to speak that aloud, so instead he said, “Oh, it’s nothing. I noticed that your nose hairs are silver too, is all.”

“……”

Index’s smile instantly froze in place.

“Touma, Touma. Do you know what’s in my right hand?”

“Well, the porridge… No, wait! Don’t offer it to gravity!”

In the next instant, Kamijou Touma met the misfortune of having his vision filled with the white porridge and its bowl.

Part 3

Kamijou and Index learned firsthand that porridge was difficult to get out of futons and pajamas. Index battled with the goopy grains of rice with slight tears in her eyes until a knock at the door drew her attention.

“Is that Komoe?”

“…Are you not going to apologize?”

He had not been burned since the porridge had already cooled by the time it was dumped on him, but Kamijou had still once again passed out when the carbohydrates struck him because he had expected the porridge to be scorching hot.

“Huh? What are you doing in front of my house?” asked a voice on the other side of the door. It seemed Komoe-sensei had spotted whoever had knocked on the door as she returned from wherever she had been.

(Then who is it?)

“Kamijou-chan, I’m not sure what’s going on, but it seems we have visitors.”

The door clicked open, and Kamijou’s shoulders jumped in surprise. Standing behind Komoe-sensei were two familiar magicians. They had appeared somewhat relieved to see Index sitting like normal.

Kamijou frowned in suspicion. Naturally, with any thought at all, they were there to retrieve Index. However, they could have retrieved her three days prior when Kamijou had collapsed. There was little reason for them to let her roam freely until the day of her “treatment”. Instead, they could have confined her somewhere until it was time.

(…So why did they wait until now to come?)

His muscles naturally tensed up as he recalled the powers of the magicians’ flames and sword.

However, Kamijou no longer had reason to simply fight Stiyl and Kanzaki. They were not “Evil Magic Cabal Forces A”; they were from Index’s Church to take her into their care. He worried for Index. In the end, he had nothing he could do but work with them and hand her over to the Church.

But, that was simply from Kamijou’s point of view.

The magicians lacked any reason to cooperate with Kamijou. Simply put, there was no reason why they couldn’t just decapitate Kamijou right then and there and take Index away with them.

Stiyl seemed to enjoy the fact that Kamijou stiffened up upon seeing them, and he said, “Heh. It looks like we won’t have to worry about you escaping with those injuries.”

At that point, Kamijou finally realized what the “enemy” was trying to do.

On her own, Index could escape the magicians. After all, she had eluded the church for almost a year on her own. Even if they captured her and locked her up somewhere, she might be able to easily escape if she were alone.

With only a few days until the time limit, they might be unable to catch up to her again if she truly began to flee again. If they imprisoned her somewhere, she might escape and it was possible she could escape even in the middle of the ceremony.

However, the same could not be said if she were burdened with an injured person like Kamijou. That was why the magicians had not killed Kamijou and why they had allowed him to return to Index. They wanted Index to refuse to give up on him so that he would function as a convenient shackle.

They had overlooked him solely so that they could more safely and surely take Index into their care.

“Leave, magicians.”

And now, Index stood between the magicians and Kamijou.

She stood up and spread her arms. She somewhat looked like a sin-bearing cross.

It was all going exactly as the magicians had planned. Index gave up on escape because of the shackles that were Kamijou.

“…” Stiyl and Kanzaki both twitched slightly.

It was as if they could not bear to watch it despite how things progressed exactly as they expected.

Kamijou wondered what expression was on Index’s face. Her back was facing him, so he could not see but those great magicians froze in place. Komoe-sensei was not the direct target of her feelings, but she still averted her gaze.

Kamijou wondered what they felt.

He wondered how it must feel to be looked at like that by someone you would go so far as to kill for.

“…Stop, Index. They aren’t our enem-…”

“Leave!!”

Index was not listening.

“Please… I’ll go wherever you want and I’ll do whatever you want. Just please, I beg of you…” Senses of feminine cries were mixed in at the heart of the hostile tone she had worked up. “Just don’t hurt Touma anymore.” Just how much damage did that do to those magicians who had once been her greatest comrades?

For an instant —just an instant— extremely pained smiles appeared on the two magicians’ faces as if they had abandoned something.

But then, their eyes froze over like a switch was flipped.

These were not the gazes of people looking at their comrade; they were the chilling gazes of magicians, holding their convictions to lessen the misfortune of the parting as much as possible rather than give her the cruel fortune of getting to know them.

The gazes held their feelings for her that were so strong they chose to abandon their comradeship and become her enemy.

Their convictions would not be break.

Because they lacked the will to tell her the truth, they could only watch on as the worst possible scenario played out.

“The time limit will come in another 12 hours and 38 minutes,” announced Stiyl in the tone of a magician.

Index must not have understood what he meant by “the time limit”.

“We simply wanted to see if her shackles would function or not so that we don’t need to worry about her running off when the time comes. They were more effective than even we expected. If you don’t want to have that toy taken from you, give up any hope of escape. Understand?”

It had to be an act. They had to want to celebrate in tearful joy that Index was okay. They had to want to rub her head and place their forehead against hers to check her temperature. That was how important she was to them.

All of the horrible things Stiyl had said about Index were simply to perfect that act. He had to actually want to spread his own arms and act as Index’s shield, and Kamijou could not imagine how much mental strength it would take to do what he was doing.

Index gave no response.

The two magicians said nothing more and merely left the room.

(Why did it turn into this…?)

Kamijou gritted his teeth.

“Are you okay?”

Finally, Index lowered her raised arms and slowly turned back towards Kamijou. He instinctually closed his eyes, unable to bear to look.

He could not bear to look at Index’s face covered in tears and uplifted by relief.

“If I make a deal with them…” He heard a voice in the darkness. “I can keep your life from being destroyed anymore, Touma. I won’t let them intrude on your life anymore, so don’t worry.”

“…”

Kamijou could not respond. He merely thought in the darkness of his closed eyes.

(…Can I let go of our memories together?)

Part 4

Night came.

Index was asleep next to the futon. Because they had been asleep since before the sun had set, the room's lights were not on.

It seemed Komoe-sensei had headed for the public bath leaving the two of them alone in the room.

Kamijou wasn't entirely sure that was the case, because he had fallen asleep as well due to his poor condition. It was nighttime by the time he had awakened. Komoe-sensei's room had no clock so he knew not what time it was. The air felt especially cold as the term "time limit" crept into his mind.

Index must have been incredibly nervous the previous three days, because she had fallen asleep, assaulted by weariness with her mouth hanging open, looking like a child who had exhausted herself nursing her sick mother.

It seemed Index had completely abandoned her original goal of merely getting to an Anglican church. If Kamijou forced himself to stand up in his beaten up state in an attempt to take her to a church, she would probably have resisted him.

He felt slightly embarrassed as she occasionally muttered his name in her sleep.

Index's defenseless, kitten-like face gave Kamijou a complex feeling.

No matter how much determination she showed, in the end, it was all going to end up exactly as the church desired. Whether Index made it safely to a church or was captured by the magicians partway there, she would still end up captured by Necessarius and have her memories erased.

Suddenly, the phone rang.

The phone in Komoe-sensei's room was a black rotary phone that could have been called an antique. Kamijou slowly looked over at the phone giving off an old-fashioned ring that sounded like an alarm clock.

He felt that he should answer the phone but also did not know if it were right to answer Komoe-sensei's phone without her permission. Nevertheless, he grabbed the receiver. He did not truly care so much about answering the phone but would feel guilty if the noisy ringing awoke Index.

"It's me… You can tell who I am, right?"

The voice coming from the receiver was a polite, female voice. Even over the phone, he could tell she was trying to keep her voice soft as if speaking in secret.

"Kanzaki…?"

"No, it would be better if we did not learn each other's names. Is she… Is Index there?"

"She's asleep, but… Wait, how do you know this number?"

"We knew the address, so it wasn't difficult to look up." Kanzaki's voice was not calm. "If she's asleep, that's perfect. Listen to what I have to say."

"?" Kamijou frowned suspiciously.

"As I mentioned before, the time limit is tonight, midnight. We have put together a schedule to end everything by that time."

Kamijou's heart froze. He knew that there was no other way to save Index. He knew it, but when the "end" was thrust before him like that, he felt cornered.

"But…" Kamijou's breathing grew shallow. "Why are you telling me this? Just stop. If you tell me this, I might end up wanting to resist you even if it gets me killed."

"…"The voice from the receiver fell silent.

It was not complete silence, though. He could hear suppressed breathing mixed in. It was a very human silence.

"…Then, do you need time for your farewells?"

"Wha—…?"

“I will be honest with you. When we first had to erase her memories, we spent the three days prior solely focused on creating memories. On the final night, we did nothing but cling to her, sobbing. I believe you have the right to that same opportunity.”

“Don’t fuck with me.” Kamijou thought he was going to crush the receiver in his grip. “That’s the same thing as giving up! You’re just telling me to give up the right to try!! You’re just telling me to give up the right to desperately challenge this!!”

“…”

“If you don’t understand, let me tell you one thing: I haven’t given up yet. In fact, I won’t be able to give up no matter what! If I fail 100 times, I’ll get back up 100 times. If I fail 1000 times, I’ll crawl to my feet 1000 times! That’s all there is to it! I’ll do what you couldn’t!!”

“This is neither a conversation nor a negotiation. It is merely a message and an order. Whatever you intend to do, we will recover her at the appointed time. If you try to stop us, we will destroy you.” The magician’s voice was as smooth as the voice of a bank receptionist.

“You might be trying to negotiate with me, counting on the human kindness left within me, but that is exactly why I am giving you this strict order.” Kanzaki’s voice was as cold as a Japanese sword drawn in the night’s air. “You will say farewell to her and leave before we arrive. Your role is nothing more than to act as shackles for her. The fate of chains that have lost their purpose is to be cut.”

The magician’s words were not simple words of hostility or scorn. She sounded as if she were trying to stop a wounded person from struggling and hurting themselves further.

“F… Fuck that.” Her tone strangely irritated Kamijou, and he snapped back at her. “Everyone is shoving their own incompetences onto me. You two are magicians, right? I thought magicians made the impossible possible!? But look at you! Can you really do nothing about this with magic!? Can you really stand before Index and proudly tell her you tried every last option!?”

“…*Nothing can be done about this with magic.* I wouldn’t be proud of it, but I find it impossible to lie to that girl,” said Kanzaki as she gritted her teeth. “If we

could do anything, we would have done it long ago. No one would want to use this cruel ultimatum if they did not have to."

"…What?"

"It seems you cannot even give up if you do not understand the situation. I don't think this is a good use of your last moments with her, but *I will give you a helping hand of despair.*" The magician spoke smoothly as if she were reading from the Bible. "Her eidetic memory is not a type of esper power nor is it a type of magic. It is a natural part of her. It is the same as poor eyesight or allergies. *It is not a type of curse that can be broken.*"

"…"

"We are magicians. With any circumstances created by magic, there is a danger of it being dispelled by magic."

"I thought it was an anti-occult defense system created by a magic specialist? Can't you do something with Index's 103,000 grimoires!? She said that controlling those would give you the power of a god, but if it can't even heal one girl's head, it doesn't sound so great to me!"

"Oh, you're referring to a magic god. The Church is extremely afraid of Index rebelling. That is why they put a 'collar' on her so that the maintenance only the Church can perform must be carried out once a year by erasing her memories. Did you really think they would leave any possibility of her removing that collar herself?" Kanzaki spoke quietly. "There is likely a bias in her 103,000 grimoires. For instance, she was probably disallowed from memorizing any grimoires that dealt with manipulating memories. I would be willing to bet that the Church has put up some security like that."

"God damn it," Kamijou cursed under his breath. "…You said 80 percent of Index's brain is taken up by the information in the 103,000 grimoires, right?"

"Yes. It is apparently actually 85 percent, but it is impossible for us magicians to destroy those grimoires. An Original grimoire cannot even be destroyed by an inquisitioner, after all, meaning that we can only hollow out the remaining 15 percent, her memories, to increase the empty space in her head."

"…Then, what about us on the science side?"

“…”

She fell silent.

Kamijou wondered if it were possible. The magicians knew their field, magic, backward and forwards, and they could not do it. If they were not going to give up, it was only natural to move to a different field.

For example, there was science.

And, if they were going there, it made sense to have someone to act as an arbitrator. It was the same as having a local help someone out when one had to walk through an unfamiliar country and negotiate with various peoples.

“…There was a time when I believed the same thing.”

Kamijou had not expected her to say so.

“To be honest, I simply did not know what to do. The world of magic that I had believed in absolutely was unable to save a single girl. I understand the feeling of trying to grasp at straws.”

“…”

Kamijou had a premonition what would come next.

“It just does not feel right to hand her over to science.”

He had expected it, but actually hearing it still felt like being stabbed in the brain.

“I know that you people cannot do something that we cannot. Your crude methods of filling her body with some unknown drug and chopping her up with a scalpel will do nothing but unnecessarily shorten her life. I do not want to see her *be violated by machines.*”

“Okay, that’s it. How the hell can you say that when you’ve never even tried it? I have a question for you. You keep talking about destroying memories, but do you really know what memory loss is exactly?”

No response came.

(She must really not know much about science.)

Kamijou pulled some Curriculum textbooks that were on the ground towards himself with his foot. It was a recipe for powers development including a mix of neuroscience, rare psychology, and reactionary drugs.

“How can you talk on about an eidetic memory and losing memories when you don’t even know what it is? There are many different kinds of memory loss.” He began to flip through the pages. “There’s aging… I guess like senility. And apparently you can lose your memories from getting drunk with alcohol. There’s a brain disease called Alzheimer’s and there’s TIA where blood stops flowing to your brain and your memories disappear. Memory loss is also a side effect of general anesthetics like halothane, isoflurane, and fentanyl, of derivatives of barbituric acid, and of drugs like benzodiazepine.”

“??? Benzo… What?”

Kanzaki’s voice was surprisingly weak, but Kamijou had no duty to explain it all to her, so he ignored her.

“Simply put, there are tons of ways to medically eliminate someone’s memories. It means that there are methods you people can’t use that can get rid of her 103,000 grimoires, you idiot.”

Kanzaki’s breathing froze.

However, these methods did not remove the memories. Instead, they damaged the brain cells. An old man with dementia could not remember more just because he lost some memories.

But, Kamijou left that part out. Even if it were just a bluff, he had to stop the magicians from forcibly erasing her memories.

“And, this is Academy City. There are plenty of espers that can manipulate people’s minds with powers like **Psychometry**[a35] or **Marionette**.[a36] Not to mention that there are research facilities all over the place. It’s way too soon to give up hope. Apparently, there’s even a Level 5 at Tokiwadai who can remove people’s memories just by touching them.”

That was where the last ray of hope truly lay.

No voice came from the receiver.

Kamijou continued on to truly defeat Kanzaki who was starting to show signs of hesitation.

“Well? What will you do, magician? Are you still going to get in my way? Are you going to give up on trying when someone’s life hangs in the balance?”

“…Those words are much too cheap to convince an enemy,” Kanzaki said with a slight tone of self derision. “We have a practiced and genuine method of saving her life. I cannot trust in this untested gamble of yours. Do you really think you can change that with some reckless statements?”

Kamijou remained silent for a moment.

He tried to come up with a rebuttal, but he could come up with nothing.

He had no choice but to accept it.

“…True enough. In the end, we just can’t understand each other.”

He had no choice but to accept that she was his enemy despite the fact that there was a possibility she could have understood. After all, she was once in the same situation.

“Yes. If people who wished for the same thing would always become allies, the world would be completely filled with peace,” she said.

Kamijou’s grip on the receiver strengthened slightly.

That beaten up right hand was his sole weapon and it could negate even the systems created by God.

“…Then, you are my arch enemy and I will defeat you,” he said.

“Given the differences in our physical abilities, the result is immensely clear. Do you still intend to call this hand?”

“Perfect. I raise. I just have to invite you into circumstances where I’m

guaranteed to win.”

Kamijou bared his canines at the receiver.

Stiyl had definitely not been weaker than Kamijou. Kamijou had only won because Stiyl had lost to the sprinkler system. In short, differences in strength could be made up with strategy.

“Just so you know: the next time that girl collapses, you should consider it too late.” Kanzaki’s words were as sharp as the tip of a sword. “We will be there at midnight. You don’t have much time left, but make your final useless struggles good ones.”

“You’re not going to see me cry, magician. I’m going to save her and steal all your scenes.”

“Stay there and wait for us,” she said and hung up.

Kamijou silently put down the receiver and looked up at the ceiling as if he were staring up at the moon in the night sky.

“Damn it!”

He swung his right fist down on the tatami mat as if punching an opponent he had pinned down. His wounded right hand did not hurt even in the slightest. His head was in such chaos that his pain was blown away.

He had acted quite full of himself on the phone, but he was neither a brain surgeon nor a professor of neuroscience. Something might have been possible if done scientifically, but that normal high school student had no idea what that something might have been.

Even so, he could not simply stop.

He felt an intense impatience and unease as if he were stranded in a desert with only the horizon in every direction and subsequently told to walk back to town.

Once the time limit came, the magicians would mercilessly destroy Index’s memories. They were likely already lying in wait near the apartment, planning to capture her if they tried to escape.

He had no idea why the magicians did not attack then and there. It could have been out of sympathy for Kamijou. Perhaps they did not want to move Index right before the time limit. He had no idea which it was or even if it was something else.

He looked at Index's face as she lay curled up, asleep on the tatami mats.

He then stood tall, completely fired up.

Academy City had more than 1000 research facilities both large and small, but a first year student like Kamijou had no connections with any of them. He was going to have to contact Komoe-sensei.

Whether anything could be done in less than a day was a valid question. Index's time limit was drawing near, but Kamijou had a secret plan for it: if her brain were to burst if she continued to add more memories, couldn't he buy her some time by putting her to sleep so that she would not gain more memories?

A Romeo and Juliet-like drug that put one in a state of apparent death sounded very unrealistic, but he did not have to go that far. Basically, he just had to put her to sleep with some laughing gas, a general anesthetic used for surgeries.

There were no worries about her dreaming while she slept and creating memories that way. Kamijou had learned a bit about the system of sleep in the powers development lessons. He was nearly sure that people only dreamed in a state of light sleep. Once one entered a state of deep sleep, *your brain rested to the point that it even forgot that it had dreamed.*

Therefore, Kamijou needed two things.

The first was to contact Komoe-sensei and acquire help from a research facility that dealt in either neuroscience or perhaps esper powers related to the mind.

The second was to slip past the magicians and get Index out of there or to create circumstances in which he could defeat the two magicians.

Kamijou decided to start with calling Komoe-sensei. But, when he thought about it, he did not actually know her cell number.

"Wow, I'm an idiot…" he said, almost wanting to kill himself as he looked

around the room.

He saw nothing out of the ordinary besides the cramped 4.5 tatami room that looked like an unknown type of labyrinth. With the lights off, the room was as dark as the night's sea, and the books and knocked over beer cans littering the floor appeared like they had something hiding behind them. When he thought about all the drawers in the dresser and cabinet, he felt like his consciousness was going to slip away.

Trying to find a cell phone number that may not even have been there seemed like an insane task. It seemed like a task akin to finding a battery thrown out the day before which was now in a landfill.

Even so, he could not stop. Kamijou started turning over everything in the area searching for a memo or something that would have her cell phone number written on it. Every minute and every second mattered, so searching for something that may have not been there was hardly a sane thing to be doing. Every time his heart beat, it irritated him, and every time he breathed, more impatience burned within him. At first glance, it may have appeared like he was just throwing around everything near him in anger.

He checked deep into the cabinet, and he pulled out all the books on the shelf. While Kamijou was rampaging around, Index continued to sleep curled up on the ground, which made it seem like time had stopped for her.

Seeing her in her complete "cat in the kotatsu" mode, he strangely felt like hitting her, but, at that same time, a scrap of paper stuck in a notebook, which seemed to be for a household account book, fluttered to the ground at his feet.

It was Komoe-sensei's itemized cell phone bill.

Kamijou immediately grabbed the scrap of paper and found an eleven digit number written on it. It seemed she had spent an entire 142,500 yen on the cell phone the previous month. She must have gotten stuck with some terrible phone. Normally, he would have rolled around laughing for around three days at the discovery, but it was hardly the time. Needing to make a call, he headed for the black phone.

He had a feeling it had taken quite a bit of time finding the phone number.

He had no idea if a few hours had passed or if it had only been a few minutes. Kamijou's heart felt so cornered that his sense of time was thrown off that much.

He called the number and Komoe-sensei answered after the third ring as if she had timed it.

About to foam at the mouth, Kamijou yelled an "explanation" that was hard for even him to understand, because his mind simply could not sort out what he wanted to say.

"…Hm? My major is in Pyrokinesis, so I don't have many connections in **Mind Hound**[a37] related things. You could probably use the Takizawa Institution or the Todai University Hospital, but their equipment is second-rate. Calling in a guest esper who excels at that field would be a safe bet. I know Yotsuba-san in Judgment is a **Level 4**[a38] **Telepath**,[a39] and she would likely be willing to help."

He had not given her much of an explanation, but Komoe-sensei still rattled off an answer. Kamijou decidedly realized that he should have consulted with her from the beginning.

"But, Kamijou-chan. Even if these researching teachers are terrible people who've flipped day and night, they probably wouldn't like being called by a student at this hour. How about we just prepare a bed in a facility for now?"

"What? …No, sensei. I'm sorry, but this is urgent. Can't we just wake them now?"

"But," Komoe-sensei responded sounding slightly irritated, "It's already 12."

Kamijou suddenly froze in place. The room had no clock but even if it had one, Kamijou would have lacked the courage to check the time.

His gaze zeroed in on Index.

She was curled up, fast asleep on the tatami mats, but her arms and legs that were sprawled about weren't moving. They weren't moving at all.

"…In… dex?" Kamijou called out timidly.

Index did not move.

Like someone with a fever, she had fallen deeply asleep, completely unresponsive.

A voice came from the receiver but Kamijou dropped it before he could gather what was being said. A terrible sweat had started on his palms. A terrible feeling weighed in his gut as if a bowling ball were dropped there.

He heard footsteps in the passageway leading to the apartment.

—We will be there at midnight. You don't have much time left, but make your final useless struggles good ones.

The instant Kamijou recalled those words, the apartment door was kicked open from the outside. Pale moonlight fell into the room like the sunlight shining through the leaves into a forest thicket.

With the perfect full moon to their backs, the two magicians stood in the doorway.

At that moment, the hands of all clocks across Japan indicated it was precisely midnight.

That meant that a certain girl's time limit was up.

That was what it meant.

Chapter 4: The Exorcist Chooses the End.
(N)Ever_Say_Good_bye.

With moonlight at their backs, the two magicians stepped through the door still wearing their outdoor shoes.

Stiyl and Kanzaki had returned, but Index did not stand in their way this time. She did not shout at them to leave. She was covered in sweat like she was suffering from a fever, and her breathing was so shallow it sounded like one could blow it out like a candle flame.

A headache.

A headache so great it felt like even the slight sound of accumulating snow would split her head open.

"…"

Kamijou and the magicians exchanged no words.

Still in his outdoor shoes, Stiyl pushed Kamijou aside as the boy stood there dumbfounded. The shove had held little force, but Kamijou could not hold his ground. He fell on his backside atop the old tatami mats as if all strength had left his body.

Stiyl neglected to even look in Kamijou's direction. He knelt down next to Index, whose limbs were sprawled out limply. The magician then muttered something under his breath.

His shoulders were trembling. He was a perfect representation of human angers felt when a person's precious was hurt before them.

"Based on Crowley's Moonchild, we will use the method of capturing an angel to create a chain of events that will summon, capture, and have a fairy work for

our ends.”

Having gathered his resolve, Stiyl stood up. When he turned, his expression was void of the slightest hint of humanity. His face was the face of a magician who abandoned his humanity to save a certain girl.

“Kanzaki, give me your help. *We need to destroy her memories.*”

Kamijou felt like those words stabbed into the most fragile part of his heart.

“Ah…”

He knew that robbing Index of her memories was only meant to save her.

And, Kamijou had once told Kanzaki that they should not hesitate to destroy her memories if they were truly acting solely for Index’s sake. No matter how many times she lost her memories, they just had to give her even better memories the next time. That way she could look forward to the coming year even if she must lose her memories.

But…

(Wasn’t that just a compromise to be made after exhausting every other option?)

“…”

Without realizing it, Kamijou had begun clenching his fist hard enough to crack his nails.

Could he do it? Could he just give up? Any number of research facilities dealing with a human’s memories and mind existed in Academy City. Could he really give up here when there might be a happier way to save Index in one of those facilities? Using old fashioned magic would destroy the memories that she cared about the most. Was it really okay to continue to rely on the world’s easiest, and the world’s cruelest, method.

No, that was irrelevant. All the boring reasoning and rationalization no longer mattered.

Could he… Could Kamijou Touma bear to have the week he spent with Index

reverted to a blank slate like someone deleted the save data for a video game?

"…Wait." Kamijou Touma raised his head.

He directly and honestly raised his head with the intention of opposing the magicians who were acting to save Index.

"Wait, please wait! Just a bit longer! Just a bit! There are 2.3 million espers in Academy City and there are over 1000 research institutions running it all. There's Psychometry, Marionette, Telekinesis, and **Materialize**![a40] We have tons of espers who can manipulate minds and labs that develop the mind! If we get their help, we might not have to rely on this horrible method!"

"…"

Stiyl Magnus said nothing. Even so, Kamijou continued to shout at the flame magician.

"You don't want to use this method either, right!? Deep down in your heart, you're praying that there is some other way, right!? Then just wait a bit longer. I will make sure to find an ending where everyone is smiling and everyone is happy! So…!!"

"…"

Stiyl Magnus said nothing.

Kamijou had no idea why he was going so far. He had only met Index a week before. He had lived for 16 years before then without knowing her, and there was no reason why he would be unable to live a normal life without her from then on.

There was no reason why, yet he knew he could not.

He did not know why. He was not even sure if he needed a reason why.

He just knew it hurt.

It hurt to think that her words, her smile, and her mannerisms would never be directed towards him again.

It hurt to think that the memories of that week would be easily wiped clean by someone else as if a reset button were being pressed.

Just considering the possibility caused great pain in the most precious and kindest part of his heart.

"…"

Silence filled the room like that of an elevator's. Rather than a silence where one was capable of making noise, the odd silence there was filled with only the faint sound of breathing, the people there merely remaining silent.

Kamijou raised his head.

With great caution, he looked at the magician.

"Is that all you want to say, you self-righteous failure?"

And… That was all the runic magician Stiyl Magnus said.

It was not that he had not listened to what Kamijou said.

His ears had heard every single one of Kamijou's words, had processed them, and had comprehended their meaning as well as the feelings hidden below the surface.

And yet, Stiyl Magnus did not move so much as an eyebrow.

Kamijou's words had not hit home with him in the slightest.

"Out of the way," said Stiyl. Kamijou had no idea how the muscles on his face were moving. Without so much as a sigh, Stiyl said to Kamijou, "Look."

He pointed. Before Kamijou could look over in the direction Stiyl was pointing, he grabbed Kamijou's hair.

"Look!!"

"Ah…" Kamijou's voice froze over.

Before his eyes, he saw Index who looked like her breathing could stop at any

moment.

“Can you say the same thing in front of her?” Stiyl’s voice trembled. “Can you say the same thing while she is mere seconds away from death!? Can you say the same thing while she is in too much pain to even open her eyes!? Can you tell her to wait because you have some things you’d like to try out!!?”

“…”

Index’s fingers stirred. It was unclear if she were barely conscious or if she were moving subconsciously, but she desperately moved her hand that seemed as heavy as lead and tried to touch Kamijou’s face.

It was as if she were desperately trying to protect Kamijou as the magician grabbed his hair.

It was as if she thought her own intense pain was meaningless.

“If you can, then you are not human! Anyone who could see her like this and still inject her with some untested drug, let some strange doctor mess with her body, and fill her body with drugs can’t possibly be human!” Stiyl’s shout stabbed through Kamijou’s eardrums and into his brain. “Answer me, esper. Are you still human or are you a monster who has abandoned his humanity!?”

“…” Kamijou could not answer.

Stiyl went in for one last blow like stabbing a sword into the heart of a deceased.

He pulled a necklace with a small cross on it from his pocket.

“This tool is needed to destroy her memories.” Stiyl waved the cross in front of Kamijou’s face. “As you might guess, it’s a magical item. If you touch it with your right hand, it should lose all power just like my Innocentius.”

The cross swayed back and forth in front of Kamijou like a five yen coin being used for a cheap bit of hypnotism.

“*But can you negate it*, esper?”

As if he had frozen in place, Kamijou stared up at Stiyl.

“When that girl is suffering before your very eyes, can you take this from her!? If you believe so much in your own power, then negate it, oh mutant who thinks he’s a hero!”

Kamijou stared.

He looked at the cross swaying before his eyes. He looked at the abominable cross that could rob people of their memories.

As Stiyl had said, he could stop the deletion of Index’s memories if he took that from him. It was nothing difficult. He just had to reach out his hand and lightly touch it with the tips of his fingers.

That was all. It should have been so easy. Kamijou clenched his trembling right hand until it was as hard as rock.

But he could not do it.

For the moment, magic was the one safe and surefire way to save Index. How could he take that from the girl who was suffering and putting up with it all?

He simply could not.

“Our preparations will be complete at 0:15 at the earliest. We will destroy her memories using the power of Leo,” Stiyl said to Kamijou in disinterest.

0:15… He likely had less than 10 minutes left.

“…!!”

He wanted to shout out and tell them to stop. He wanted to yell out and tell them to wait. However, Kamijou would not be the one who would suffer as a result. The cost of Kamijou’s selfishness would all come back to Index.

(Just accept it.)

—My name is Index.

(Just accept it already.)

—Anyway, it would be great if you could feed me enough food to fill me up.

(Just accept that you, Kamijou Touma, have neither the power nor the right to save Index!)

Kamijou could not shout and could not cry out.

He could only stare up at the ceiling, grit his back teeth, and let tears he could not hold back fall from his eyes.

"…Hey, magician," Kamijou muttered blankly as he continued to stare up at the ceiling and lean against the bookshelf. "How do you think I should say farewell to her in the end?"

"We don't have time for this nonsense."

"I see," replied Kamijou blankly.

Kamijou would have remained frozen in place there, but Stiyl did not let up.

"Leave this place, monster." The magician looked at Kamijou. "Your right hand negated my flames. I still don't understand how it works and we can't have it interfering with the spell we are going to use."

"I see," replied Kamijou emptily. Kamijou gave a small, corpse-like smile. "It was the same with that wound on her back. Why is there never anything I can do?" How should I know? Stiyl's eyes seemed to say.

"I can destroy even the systems of God with this right hand." Kamijou seemed to crumble. "So why can't I save just one suffering girl?"

He smiled. He did not curse fate, and he did not blame it on misfortune. He simply reflected on his own powerlessness.

Kanzaki looked at him with a pained expression and said, "We still have 10 minutes until we perform the ceremony at 0:15."

Stiyl looked at Kanzaki as if he could not believe what he was seeing. But, Kanzaki only smiled when she looked at Stiyl.

"On the night we first swore to erase her memories, we spent the whole night crying by her side. Isn't that right, Stiyl?"

“…” Stiyl fell silent for a moment as if his breath had caught in his throat. “B-But we have no idea what he’ll do. What if he attempts a double suicide while we aren’t looking?”

“If he were willing to do that, don’t you think he would have touched the cross right away? You only used the real cross rather than a fake because you were already sure he was human, right?”

“But…”

“Whatever we do, we cannot perform the ceremony until the time is right. If he has any regrets left, he might try to stop us mid-ceremony, Stiyl.”

Stiyl gritted his teeth. He held himself back like he was on the verge of lunging and ripping out Kamijou’s throat like a beast.

“You have 10 minutes. Okay!?”

He then spun around and left the apartment.

Kanzaki silently followed Stiyl from the room, but a heartbreaking smile could be seen in her eyes.

The door closed. Only Kamijou and Index remained in the room. The 10 minutes had been gained at the risk of not Kamijou’s life, but Index’s. And yet, Kamijou knew not what he was supposed to do.

“Ah… Kh. Fh…” A few odd noises escaped Index’s lips as she lay limply sprawled out. Kamijou jumped in shock.

Index opened her eyes slightly. She seemed to wonder why she was in the futon, worrying about where Kamijou was when he should have been in the futon.

She had completely forgotten about herself.

“…”

Kamijou gritted his teeth. At that moment, standing before her was more frightening than fighting those magicians.

But, running away was not an option.

“Touma?”

Kamijou approached the futon and Index breathed a sigh of relief. The look on her sweat-covered face was one of relief from the bottom of her heart.

“…I’m sorry,” said Kamijou as he hung his head down to meet Index’s gaze.

“…? Touma, there’s some kind of magic circle in this room.”

Index had been unconscious, so she did not know that it had been drawn by the two magicians. She tilted her head to the side in a girlish sign of puzzlement as she looked at the symbols drawn on the wall near the futon.

“…”

For an instant, Kamijou clenched his back teeth.

It was for just an instant. Before anyone could have noticed, his expression returned to normal.

“…It’s for recovery magic. We can’t leave your headaches this bad, now can we?”

“? Magic… Who’s casting it?” At that instant, a certain possibility entered Index’s mind.

“!?”

Index forced her unmoving body to move and attempted to spring up. When her face twisted in pain, Kamijou grabbed her shoulders and pushed her back into the futon.

“Touma! Have the magicians come back!? Touma, you need to get out of here!!”

Index looked at Kamijou with an expression of disbelief. She knew just how dangerous magicians were and was wholeheartedly worried for Kamijou.

“…It’s okay, Index.”

“Touma!”

“It’s over. …It’s already over.”

“Touma,” said Index quietly and then, all strength left her body.

Kamijou had no idea what kind of expression was on his face.

“…I’m sorry,” said Kamijou. “I will get stronger. I will never lose again. I will get strong enough to kick the asses of every last person who would treat you like this…”

Even crying would have been cowardly. Inviting her sympathy was unthinkable.

“…Just wait. Next time, I will make sure to truly save you.”

How did he appear in Index’s eyes?

How did he sound in Index’s ears?

“I understand. I’ll wait.”

Because she knew not the situation, to Index, it had to seem like Kamijou had lost to the enemy and sold Index out for his own safety.

Yet, she smiled.

Her smile was battered. Her smile was perfect. Her smile looked like it would crumble at any moment. Even so, she smiled.

Kamijou could not understand. He could no longer understand how she could be that trusting of people. That was when he made up his mind.

“Once your headaches get better, let’s take out these magicians and win your freedom,” he said. “I’d like to go to the beach after that, but we’ll have to wait until my supplementary lessons are over,”

“Would you like to transfer to my school once summer vacation is over?” he asked.

“I’d like to make all sorts of memories,” Index said.

“You will,” promised Kamijou.

He continued forward with the lie.

It mattered not what was true or false. He no longer needed that kind of cold, cruel, and proper justice that could not comfort even a single girl.

The boy by the name of Kamijou Touma needed neither justice nor evil.

False words were more than enough for him, which is why Kamijou Touma shed not a single tear.

Not even one.

“…”

With a light noise, Index’s hand lost all strength and fell atop the futon. Having passed out once more, Index looked like a corpse.

“But…” Kamijou softly bit his lip as he looked at Index’s feverish face. “What kind of horrible ending is this?”

He tasted blood where he was biting his lip.

He knew that what was happening was wrong and hated how powerless he was to stop it. Yes. Kamijou could do nothing. He could neither deal with the 103,000 grimoires taking up 85 percent of Index’s brain nor protect the memories filling up the 15 percent left over.

“…Huh?”

As hopeless thoughts raced through his mind, Kamijou suddenly felt that something was off.

85 percent?

Kamijou looked back at Index’s feverish face.

85 percent. Yes, that was what Kanzaki had said. 85 percent of Index’s brain was filled with the 103,000 grimoires she had memorized. The pressure that was put on her brain meant that she could fit only a year’s worth of memories in the

remaining 15 percent. If she added any more memories than that, her brain would burst.

(But wait a second.)

“How could 15 percent only hold a year’s worth of memories?”

Kamijou had no idea how rare a condition an eidetic memory was. However, he was rather sure it was not so rare that Index was the only person in the world with it.[27]

And, the others with eidetic memories did not use some ridiculous method like magic to erase their memories.

If it were true that 15 percent of the brain could only hold a year’s worth of memories…

“*…That means they’d die at about 6 or seven years old.*”

If the condition were some kind of incurable disease like that, wouldn’t it be more prolific?

Also…

Where had Kanzaki gotten those figures, 85 percent and 15 percent?

Who had told her that?

Was the information about 85 percent of the brain even accurate?

“…They were tricked.”

What if Kanzaki truthfully knew nothing about neuroscience? What if she had simply accepted what her superiors in the Church had told her?

Kamijou had a bad premonition.

He rushed over to the black phone in the corner of the room. Komoe-sensei was out somewhere. He had searched all over the room and found her cell phone number not too long before, so that was not an issue.

The mechanical ringing sound, which had a way of truly aggravating people, continued briefly.

Kamijou had a feeling that something was mistaken in Kanzaki's description of an eidetic memory. What if that mistake were intentionally planted by the Church? They might have hidden some secret.

With a static-like noise, the phone connected.

"Sensei!!" Kamijou shouted almost entirely by reflex.

"Ohh, is that you, Kamijou-chan~? You shouldn't be using my phone~"

"…You sound happy."

"Yes~… I am at a public bath right now~. I've got a coffee milk in one hand, and I'm testing out a new massage chair~. Yes~."

"…"

Kamijou thought he would crush the receiver in his grip, but Index's situation was direr at the moment.

"Sensei, please just listen quietly to what I have to say. The truth is…"

Kamijou asked about eidetic memories.

What were they? Did a year's worth of memories really use up 15 percent of the brain? In other words, was it a condition that set one's lifespan at only 6 or seven years?

"Of course not~." Komoe-sensei cut it all down in one short sentence. "It is true that an eidetic memory makes you unable to forget garbage memories like the flyer for a sale from last year at a supermarket~. *But it isn't like the brain can burst from that*~. They'll just take their 100 years' worth of memories to their grave~. *The human brain can hold up to 140 years' worth of memories*, after all~."

Kamijou's heart skipped a beat.

“B-But what if they were learning things at a tremendous rate? Like what if they used their memory to memorize all the books in a library? Would their brain burst then?”

“Sigh… Kamijou-chan, I can see why you fail all your development lessons~,” said Komoe-sensei happily. “Listen up, Kamijou-chan~. People don’t have just one type of memory. Things like language and knowledge fall under semantic memories, things like habits falls under procedural memories, and what we most often think of as memories fall under episodic memories~. There are all sorts of types~. All sorts~.”

“Um, sensei… I don’t really understand what you mean.”

“Basically~.” Komoe-sensei loved to explain things, so she was delighted. “Each type of memory goes into different containers~. Think of it like burnable trash and unburnable trash~. If you get hit on the head and get amnesia, you don’t just start talking gibberish and crawling around on the ground, right~?”

“So…”

“Yes~. No matter how many library books the person memorized, that would only increase the amount of semantic memory~. According to neuroscience, it is *absolutely impossible* for that to overwhelm the person’s episodic memory~.”

Kamijou felt like he had received that supposed hit on the head.

The receiver slipped from his hand. The fallen receiver struck the hook, ending the call, but Kamijou no longer had the time to care.

The Church had lied to Kanzaki. Index’s eidetic memory was not a danger to her life.

“But… why?” Kamijou muttered in stunned shock.

Yes, why? Why would the Church lie and falsely state that Index would die in a year?

Also, Index’s suffering before Kamijou’s eyes certainly did not seem like a lie. If it were not being caused by her eidetic memory, then why was she suffering?

"…Ha."

After thinking that far, Kamijou suddenly laughed out loud.

Yes. *The Church had put a collar on Index.*

…A collar that forced her to require maintenance from the Church every year to survive. A collar that insured that Index would not use the 103,000 grimoires she controlled to betray them.

What if Index did not need the techniques and spells of the Church to survive?

What if she could perfectly well live on her own without the help of the Church?

In that case, the Church would never be able to leave Index be. If she could just run off and disappear with 103,000 grimoires, they would feel the need to put a collar on her.

To repeat, the Church had placed a collar on Index.

That made things simple.

There had originally been nothing wrong with Index's head, but the Church had done something to it.

"…Ha ha."

For example, what if they had done something similar to filling the bottom of a 10 liter bucket with cement so that only a liter of water could fit?

They had done something to Index's mind so that her brain would burst after only a year's worth of memories.

That way, Index had to rely on the techniques and spells of the Church.

That way, Index's comrades would have to choke back their tears and obey the Church.

They wove a devilish program that took even human kindness and sympathy into account.

“…But that doesn’t matter.”

Yes, it really did not matter.

What mattered and what he had to worry about was just one thing: the identity of the Church’s security that was causing Index’s suffering. Academy City, which monopolized espers like Kamijou, was the cutting edge of science. What was it that Necessarius controlled for magicians that was the cutting edge in its own way?

Yes, the supernatural power known as magic. And, Kamijou Touma’s right hand could negate it with a touch even if it were the systems of God.

In that room with no clock, Kamijou wondered what the time was.

He likely had little time left until the ceremony began. He looked over to the apartment door. If he told the truth to the magicians on the other side of that door, would they believe him? The answer was no. Kamijou was just a high school student. He had no medical license in neuroscience, and his relationship with the magicians might as well have been called “enemies”. He doubted they would believe him.

Kamijou lowered his gaze.

He looked at Index sprawled out on the futon. She was completely soaked in an unpleasant sweat, and her silver hair looked like a bucket of water had been dumped on her. Her face was feverishly red, and her eyebrows occasionally moved in pain.

–*When that girl is suffering before your very eyes,* can you take this from her!? *If you believe so much in your own power, then negate it, oh mutant who thinks he’s a hero!*

Kamijou gave a slight smile at the words that Stiyl had beaten him back with before.

The world had changed enough that he could smile at it.

“I don’t just think I’m a hero.”

Still smiling, he removed the white bandages thoroughly wrapped around his right hand.

It was as if he removed a seal from the hand.

“I will be the hero.”

He spoke, he smiled, and he pressed his battered right hand against Index’s forehead.

While he said it could negate even the systems of God, he had thought that it was a useless right hand that would not let him defeat even a single delinquent, would not raise his scores on tests, and would not make him popular with girls.

But, there was one thing it could do.

If it could save the girl who suffered before his very eyes, it held a most wonderful power.

…

…

…?

“……Huh?”

Nothing happened. Nothing at all happened.

There were no lights or noises, but had the magic the Church implemented been negated? No, Index still grimaced as if in pain. It certainly seemed like nothing had happened.

Kamijou looked puzzled and touched her on the cheek and the back of the head, but nothing happened. Nothing changed. Nothing changed, but he did remember something.

Kamijou had already touched Index a few times.

For instance, he had touched her all over when he carried her from the dorm building after he punched out Stiyl. When Index had revealed her identity from

within the futon, Kamijou had lightly struck her on the forehead. But of course nothing had happened.

Kamijou looked puzzled. He did not think he was wrong. Also, he doubted there was some supernatural power that his right hand could not negate. In that case…

In that case, was there some part of Index he had not touched?

"……Ah."

His mind immediately reached a very inappropriate place, but he forced it back on track.

However, he could think of nowhere besides there. If it were magic that was afflicting Index and there was no magic Kamijou's right hand could not negate, then he could only think that his right hand had yet to touch it.

But then, where was it?

Kamijou looked down at Index's feverish face. Since the magic had to do with memories, would the magic be located on her head or somewhere near her head? If there were a magic circle carved into the inside of her skull, even Kamijou would have to simply give up. If it were inside her body, he could not arbitrarily touch it with his finger that was covered in germs, but…

"…Oh."

Kamijou looked at Index's face once more.

Her eyebrows were moving in pain, her eyes were held tightly shut, and her nose was covered in mud-like sweat. Ignoring it all, Kamijou lowered his gaze to her cute lips taking shallow breaths.

Kamijou slipped his right thumb and forefinger between those lips and forced her mouth open.

…The back of her throat.

Due to the protection of the skull, the back of the throat was closer to her brain than the back of her head. Also, people would almost never see it and it was

unlikely someone would touch it. At the back of her dark red throat was a single eerie mark like something from TV horoscopes. The mark was carved in pure black.

"…"

Kamijou narrowed his eyes once, gathered his resolve, and proceeded to shove his hand into the girl's mouth.

Her mouth wriggled like it was a different creature altogether as his fingers slipped inside. The oddly warm saliva wrapped around his fingers. The unsettling feeling of her tongue made Kamijou hesitate for an instant but he then pressed his fingers in the rest of the way to jab at the back of Index's throat.

It appeared to Kamijou that Index shuddered violently with a powerful urge to vomit.

Then, he felt a slight shock in his right index finger as if from static electricity. In the same instant, his right hand was forcefully blown backwards.

"Gah…!?"

A great number of blood droplets dripped onto the futon and tatami mats.

It had felt like his wrist had been shot at by a handgun and he instinctively looked down at his right hand. The wounds Kanzaki had given him had reopened and fresh blood was audibly dripping down onto the tatami mats.

As he held his hand up before his face, he noticed something beyond it.

As Index lay limply in the futon, her eyes silently opened, and they glowed red.

The color was different from her irises.

Glowing blood red magic circles floated in her eyes.

(Not good…!!)

An instinctual chill ran down Kamijou's spine; he lacked the time to even hold his destroyed right hand up.

Her eyes glowed a frightening red, and something exploded.

With a tremendous shock, Kamijou's body struck the bookcase. The wooden planks making up the bookcase were smashed apart and the books thundered down to the floor. An intense pain rushed through Kamijou's body as if all of his joints had been smashed to pieces along with the bookcase.

Trembling, Kamijou just barely managed to stand back up, his legs threatening to collapse beneath him. The metallic taste of blood mixed in with the saliva in his mouth.

"Warning: Chapter 3, Verse 2. All barriers for Index Librorum Prohibitorum's collar from first to third have been breached. Preparing to regenerate… failed. The collar cannot self-regenerate. Switching priorities to the elimination of the intruder in order to protect the 103,000 archived grimoires."

Kamijou looked at what lay before him.

Index slowly stood up in such an unsettling manner that she seemed like a boneless, joint-less sack filled with jelly. The crimson magic circles in her eyes pierced Kamijou.

While they were technically eyes, Kamijou found it difficult to think of them as such.

They held no human light and no feminine warmth.

Kamijou had seen those eyes before. When the girl's back had been sliced open by Kanzaki, collapsing her in front of the student dorm, she had spoken about runes like a machine. These were the eyes she had at that time.

—I have no magic power, so I can't use it.

"…Come to think of it, there was one thing I forgot to ask you," Kamijou muttered under his breath as he clenched his battered right fist. "*If you're not an esper, why is it you have no magic power?*"

The answer to that question was likely right before him. The Church had prepared multiple layers of security. If someone found out about the secret of her perfect memory and tried to remove the collar, Index would automatically use her 103,000 grimoires to use the powerful magic held within in order to literally keep the person who knew the truth from saying anything ever again. All of Index's magic power was put into running that auto defense system.

"Using the 103,000 archived grimoires to determine the magic spell used to damage the barrier… failed. The specified magic cannot be determined. Putting together an anti-intruder, local weapon to expose the composition of the spell." Index tilted her head like a corpse puppet. "The magic expected to be most effective on the specific intruder has been formulated. Proceeding to activate the special magic, **St. George's Sanctuary**, to destroy the intruder."

With a tremendous noise, the two magic circles in Index's eyes grew simultaneously. Two magic circles over two meters across were now positioned in front of Index's face. Each one was fixed in place with its center over one of her eyes and the magic circles would move through the air when she slightly moved her head.

"..."

Index sang something that was beyond human comprehension.

For an instant, the two magic circles centered on her eyes glowed before exploding. More specifically, it seemed like an explosion of high voltage electricity occurred in a point in space between Index's eyes, and lightning

scattered in every direction.

However, rather than bluish-white electricity, the lightning was pitch black.

Though an unscientific description, space itself had seemingly cracked open. Centered at the point where the two magic circles crossed, pitch black spatial cracks spread out in every directions to the edges of the room.

It was like a window that was shot by a bullet. It almost seemed like a type of barrier preventing anyone from approaching Index.

Something seemingly pulsating swelled up from within the cracks. A beast-like scent wafted in from the slight opening created by the pitch black cracks.

“Ah.” Kamijou suddenly knew.

This was based on neither theory nor logic. Nor was it based on reason or sense. Perhaps his basic instincts were shouting it at him; he knew not what exactly the thing within the cracks was. However, he knew that seeing —viewing it directly and honestly— would be enough to destroy the being that was Kamijou Touma.

“Ah.” Kamijou trembled.

The cracks spread and spread and spread and spread. Even though he knew that whatever within approached, he could not move. He trembled, he trembled some more, and he truly did tremble. After all…

He just had to defeat whatever that was. He and he alone had the hand that could save Index.

“Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!”

And, that was why he trembled with delight.

Was he afraid? Of course not. After all, he had been waiting for this moment for so long.

While he said it could negate even the systems of God, his hand was so useless it would not let him defeat even a single delinquent, would not raise his scores on tests, and would not make him popular with girls.

When a girl's back had been sliced open due to him, when he had been forced to leave the apartment so as not to interfere with the recovery magic, and when the wire-wielding samurai girl had beaten him within an inch of his life, he had cursed his own powerlessness while wishing all the while that he could save that girl!

It was not that he particularly wanted to become the hero of this story. It was just that he held the power in his right hand to negate and tear this too cruel a story to pieces!

He was only four meters away. If he touched that girl just once more, he could bring it all to an end! That was why Kamijou ran toward the cracks and toward Index who stood beyond them.

He clenched his right fist.

He clenched it so he that could negate the never-ending and horribly, horribly boring ending to that cruel story.

At the same time, the cracks spread all at once and "opened". It looked as painful as a virgin's hymen being forcibly ripped open. The giant cracks opened wide enough to reach the edges of the room and the "thing" inside peered out.

A pillar of light shot out from within the cracks.

It looked something like a laser beam about a meter across. The light was so pure a white it looked like it had been melted by the sun. The instant it shot out at him, Kamijou thrust his battered right hand out in front of his face.

The sound of the impact was like a piece of meat being pressed against a hot metal sheet.

However, there was no pain… and no heat. As if it were a pillar of water coming from a fire hose being repelled by a clear wall, the pillar of light scattered in every direction when it struck Kamijou's right hand.

Even so, the pillar of light itself was not completely negated.

Just like with Stiyl's Innocentius, it seemed to have no end no matter how often he negated it. His feet planted on the tatami mats were slowly pushed backwards

and his right hand felt like it would be blown away by the great pressure.

(No… That isn't… what this is…!!)

Kamijou grabbed his right wrist with his empty left hand. He felt a stinging pain in the palm of his right hand. The magic was eating into it. His right was not negating it quickly enough and the pillar of light was approaching millimeter by millimeter.

(This isn't just a large mass! Each individual piece of light is something different!!)

It was possible Index was using her 103,000 grimoires to use 103,000 different types of magic at the same time. Each individual grimoire held instant death and she was using them all at once.

Suddenly, Kamijou heard some noise from the other side of the apartment.

(Did they only now notice something's wrong?)

The door swung open and the two magicians charged in.

"Dammit, what are you doing!? You're still struggling in—…!?" Stiyl began to shout but his breath caught in his throat, as if punched in the back. The sight of the pillar of light and of Index who had fired it had him look like his heart had stopped.

Kanzaki, who had seemed so superior and powerful before, looked utterly taken aback by the scene displayed before her.

"**D-Dragon Breath**?[a41] It can't be. Just how is she using magic!?"

Kamijou did not turn around.

While it was true he was hardly in a situation where he could turn around, it had more to do with him not wanting to take his eyes off of Index.

"Hey, do you know what this pillar of light is!?" He shouted at them without turning around. "What's it called?"

“What is it!? What’s its weakness!? What should I do? Explain each and every step from start to finish!!”

“…But… but… what is…?”

“God, you piss me off! Isn’t it obvious!? If Index is using magic, it means the Church was lying when they told you Index couldn’t use magic!” Kamijou shouted while blowing away the pillar of light. “Oh, and that whole thing about Index having to have her memories erased every year? That was another lie! The Church was the one limiting her, so if I negate this thing, you won’t have to erase her memories anymore!!”

Kamijou’s feet slowly but surely slid backwards.

The power behind the pillar of light nightmarishly doubled as if to rip up his toes that were digging into the tatami mat.

“Calm down! Calm down and think about this rationally! Do you really think the people who created the cruel system behind Index would kindly tell their subordinates the whole truth of the situation!? Look at the reality in front of you! Ask Index herself if you like!!”

The two magicians stared blankly at Index who stood beyond the cracks.

“St. George’s Sanctuary is showing no effect against the intruder. Switching to another spell and continuing destruction of the intruder in order to protect the collar.”

It was clearly not the Index the two magicians knew but clearly an Index the Church had not told them about.

“…”

For an instant —just an instant— Stiyl gritted his teeth so hard it seemed they would crack.

“…Fortis931.”

Tens of thousands of cards flew from within his pitch black clothes. Cards carved with flame runes spiraled around like a typhoon and in no time at all had

covered the walls, ceiling, and floor without gap. It was just like Hoichi the Earless.

However, he did not act in order to save Kamijou. In an effort to save the girl named Index, Stiyl pressed his hand against Kamijou's back.

"I do not need any vague possibilities. As long as I can erase her memories, I can save her life for now. I will kill anyone to accomplish that. I will destroy anything! That is what I decided long ago." Kamijou's feet that had been sliding further and further back suddenly stopped.

An unbelievable power caused the tatami mats his toes were digging into to creak horribly.

"*For now*?" Kamijou did not turn around. "To hell with that. I don't care about anything like that! I don't need reasons or logic! Just answer me one thing, magicians!!"

Kamijou sucked in a breath before continuing.

"Do you want to save Index or not?"

The magicians stopped breathing.

"You've been waiting for this the whole time, haven't you? You've been waiting for a solution where Index doesn't have to lose her memories and you don't have to make an enemy of her, right!? This is that kind of wonderful, wonderful happy ending that everyone wants where everyone is happy!"

An unpleasant noise came from his right wrist as he continued to force it against the pillar of light.

Even so, Kamijou did not give up.

"You've always longed for this turn of events, haven't you!? You aren't filling in until the hero shows up! You aren't buying time until the main character can appear! There's no one else! There's nothing else! Didn't you swear to save that girl with your own two hands!?"

A crack ran down the fingernail of his right index finger and red blood flowed

out.

Even so, Kamijou did not give up.

“You’ve always, always wanted to be the heroes, right!? You wanted to become the kind of magicians you find in picture books and movies that risk their lives to save the girl, right!? Then this isn’t anywhere near over!! It hasn’t even begun!! Don’t fall into despair just because the prologue dragged on a bit too long!!”

The magicians’ voices were silenced.

Kamijou would not give up. What did he look like in the magicians’ eyes?

“*If you stretch out your hand, you can reach it! Just do it already, magicians!*”

An odd cracking noise was heard from Kamijou’s right pinky.

When he realized the finger was bent —broken— at an unnatural angle, the pillar of light attacked with tremendous force and finally knocked Kamijou’s right hand away.

His hand was knocked a good ways backwards.

Kamijou’s face was completely defenseless and the pillar of light rushed towards it at a dreadful speed.

“**…Salvare000!!**”[a42]

The instant before the pillar of light struck his face, he heard Kanzaki yell.

It was not Japanese. He had never heard the word before. However, he had heard a similar word… no, a similar name once before. It had been during his confrontation with Stiyl at the dorm. He had said it was the name he must give when he used magic. His magic name.

Kanzaki’s approximately two meter long Japanese sword sliced through the air. Her Nanasen attack utilizing seven wires flew towards Index at a speed that seemed to slice through sound itself.

But, she did not aim for Index.

The wires tore through the fragile tatami mat at Index's feet. Having lost her footing, Index fell backwards. The magic circles linked to her eyes moved and the pillar of light that was supposed to be aimed at Kamijou missed its target considerably.

As if it were a giant sword being swung around, the pillar of light sliced through the wall and ceiling of the apartment. It even sliced through the pitch black clouds floating in the night sky. In fact, it could have even sliced through a satellite outside the atmosphere.

Not even a splinter remained where the walls and ceiling had been sliced.

Instead, the portions that had been destroyed had become feathers of light that were as pure a white as the pillar of light. They floated down. Kamijou had no idea what effects they might have had, but a few dozen of those feathers of light came floating down like winter snow on that summer night.

"Those are the same as Dragon Breath, the strike of the legendary dragon of St. George! Whatever power they may have, I highly doubt the human body will react well to them!"

Having heard Kanzaki's warning and having been freed from the bonds of the pillar of light, Kamijou ran towards Index as she lay collapsed on the ground.

But before he could, Index turned her head.

Like a giant sword being swung, the pillar of light was swung back down, slicing back through the night sky.

Kamijou was going to be caught by it again!

"Innocentius!"

As Kamijou prepared himself, a spiral of flame appeared in front of him.

The giant flame took on the form of a person and then spread out its arms to act as a shield against the pillar of light.

It was truly like a cross protecting man from sin.

“Go, esper!” shouted Stiyl. “Her time limit has already passed! If you want to do this, don’t even waste a second!!”

Kamijou did not respond with words or even turn around.

Before he could, he ran around the colliding flame and light towards Index. He did it because Stiyl wanted him to. He did it because he had heard Stiyl’s words and understood the meaning held in them and the feelings hidden behind them.

Kamijou ran.

He ran!!

“Warning: Chapter 6, Verse 13. New enemy confirmed. Changing combat considerations. Beginning scan of the battlefield… done. Focusing on the destruction of the most difficult enemy, Kamijou Touma.”

Index swung her head around, pillar of light and all.

However, Innocentius moved to protect Kamijou at the same time. The light and flames continued to eat into each other in an extended conflict of destruction and regeneration.

Kamijou ran straight for the now defenseless Index.

Four more meters.

Three more meters.

Two more meters!

One more meter!!

“Nooo!! Above you!!” Kanzaki yelled with a voice that seemed to tear through everything.

Kamijou had just reached the point where he could reach the magic circles in front of Index’s face if he stretched out his hand. Without stopping his feet, he looked up at the ceiling.

The feathers of light...

The few dozen shining feathers that had been created when Index's pillar of light had destroyed the wall and ceiling were slowly floating down like snowflakes. They had just floated down far enough to be about to reach Kamijou's head.

Despite knowing nothing about magic, Kamijou could still tell that having even one of those feathers touch him would have had extremely undesirable results.

He also knew that he could easily negate them by using his right hand.

But…

"Warning: Chapter 22, Verse 1. Analysis of the flame magic spell has succeeded. It is confirmed to be a distorted Christian motif described with runes. Adding in anti-Christian spells… Spell 1, Spell 2, Spell 3. Twelve seconds until the complete activation of the spell named **Eli Eli Lema Sabachthani**."[28][a43]

The pillar of light's color turned from pure white to crimson.

Innocentius's regeneration speed visibly slowed and the pillar of light pushed forward.

Using his right hand to take out each and every one of the dozens of feathers of light would most likely take too much time. There was also a danger of Index managing to stand back up, and, most importantly, Innocentius clearly wouldn't last that long.

The dozens of feathers of light floated above the single, controlled girl at his feet whose every feeling was being used.

It was a simple question of who to save and who to let fall.

The answer was obvious.

Kamijou Touma had not been swinging his right hand around for his own sake.

He had been fighting the magicians in order to save a certain girl.

(God, if this world, this story, is moving ahead according to the system you created…)

Kamijou spread open the five fingers of his clenched fist almost as if he were going to wash his palm.

(…then I first need to destroy that illusion!!)

Kamijou swung his right hand down.

He swung it down on the black cracks and the magic circles that had produced those cracks. Kamijou's right hand easily tore them apart. It was so simple that it made him want to laugh at how much suffering they had caused. He broke through them as easily as the paper of a goldfish scoop once wet.

"…Warning: Final… Chapter, Verse Zero…. The collar has received fatal… damage… Regeneration… impossible… gone."

The voice coming from Index's mouth ended altogether.

The pillar of light and magic circles disappeared, and it was almost as if the cracks that had been running all across the room had been erased with an eraser.

At that moment, one of the feathers of light fell down on Kamijou Touma's head.

He thought he heard someone shout.

He knew not whether it was Stiyl, Kanzaki, himself, or even Index who might have woken up.

As if he had been hit in the head by a hammer, all strength left his entire body, down to the very last finger.

Kamijou fell down and covered Index who was still collapsed on the floor.

It was like he protected her body from the falling feathers of light. The dozens of feathers of light floated down like snowflakes towards every part of Kamijou's body.

Even so, Kamijou Touma smiled. He smiled and he never moved those fingertips again.

On that night, Kamijou Touma "died".

Epilogue: The Conclusion of the Index of Prohibited Books Girl. *Index-Librorum-Prohibitorum.*

“Seems it was nothing,” said a plump doctor in an examination room of a university hospital.

The doctor spun around in a swiveling chair. He seemed to have been aware he resembled a frog, because he had a sticker of a small tree frog on the ID card on his chest.

Index may have had a great love for humanity, but scientists were the one group she did not care for. While magicians were indeed a collection of oddities, she felt scientists were even odder.

She wondered why she was alone with him, but, without anyone to be with, she had no choice.

Correct, she had no one to be with.

“I don’t like speaking so politely to someone who isn’t my patient, so I’m going to stop. This is my first and last question to you as a doctor: Why did you come here to my hospital?”

Not even Index knew the answer to that question.

No one —truly no one— had told her the truth.

She disliked having magicians, whom she thought were her enemies, tell her about the yearly wiping of her memories or about how a certain boy had risked his life to save her from those horrible circumstances.

“But having three people in Academy City without an ID is quite a surprise. Did you know a strange beam shot down one of our surveillance satellites? It’s left Judgment quite busy.”

(That wasn’t your first and last question at all.)

Index was one of the three without an ID. The other two were likely those magicians. Despite having chased her all over, they had brought her to the hospital and then disappeared without a trace.

“By the way, that letter you have there is from *them,* isn’t it?”

The frog-faced doctor stared at the envelope in Index’s hand that looked like it could hold even a love letter. With an angry look, Index ripped the envelope apart and took out the letter.

“Oh? I thought it was addressed to that boy, not you.”

“It doesn’t matter,” replied Index indignantly.

Since the letter was sent by “Stiyl Magnus” and started with “Dear Kamijou Touma”, it was simply too suspicious. A deadly malice could be felt from the heart sticker on the envelope.

At any rate, the letter read…

Any standard greetings would be a waste of time, so I’m skipping them.

Well you’ve done it, you bastard... and I’d like to go on like that, but if I threw all my personal feelings at you here, I would end up using up all the trees in the world and still not have enough paper for this letter. As such, I’ll end that there, you bastard.

It went on like that for 8 pages of stationery. Index silently and carefully read through it all, crushing up each page she finished and tossing it behind her. The doctor’s frog face grew more and more annoyed with each new balled-up page littering the floor of his workplace, but could not say anything to Index who emitted the odd intimidation of a bullied child on the verge of tears.

Now on the 9th and final page, the following was written:

For now, I will do the bare minimum of what etiquette demands of me for your help and explain the girl and her circumstances. I can’t have either of us owing each other anything. The next time we meet, we are sure to be enemies.

We don't trust you scientists, so we examined her in our own way before the doctors saw her, and she seems to be fine. The higher ups in the Anglican Church seem to want to retrieve her as soon as possible now that her collar has been removed, but I think a more wait-and-see approach would be better. Although personally, I cannot stand to have her with you for even an instant longer.

However, she used magic based on the 103,000 grimoires when in the John's Pen mode that the Church prepared. Now that John's Pen has been destroyed, it is possible she can use magic with her own free will now. If the destruction of John's Pen has caused her magic power to recover, we must reorganize our strength.

That said I don't see how her magic power could have realistically recovered. It's hardly worth warning you, but a magic god that can freely use those 103,000 grimoires is just that dangerous.

(By the way, this does not mean we have given up and are leaving her to you. Once we have gathered the information we need and gathered the equipment we need, we intend to come back to take that girl again. I don't like catching people off guard, so make sure you prepare yourself for our arrival.)

P.S. This letter is made to self-destruct after it has been read. Even if you had realized the truth, you need to be punished for making that bet without consulting us. I hope this blows off a finger or two of that precious right hand of yours.

Post-letter, one of Stiyl's runes was carved into the paper. As soon as Index frantically threw the letter away, it burst into pieces with a crackling noise.

"You seem to have some rather extreme friends. Did they soak the letter in a liquid explosive?"

The fact that the letter exploding did not surprise the doctor made Index half-seriously think he was a bit crazy himself. However, Index's feelings seemed to have numbed over too, because no other thoughts entered her mind. As such, she decided to do what she had come to the hospital to do in the first place.

"If you want to know about that boy, it would be fastest to just meet with him directly…Or so I'd like to say." The frog-faced doctor truly seemed to be

enjoying himself. “It would be rude for you to receive the shock before the boy himself, so how about a quick lesson beforehand?”

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She knocked on the door twice.

It was all she did, but Index still felt like her heart would burst. While waiting for a response, she restlessly wiped the sweat from her palms onto the skirt of her habit and crossed herself.

“Yes?” replied the boy.

Index brought her hand to the door but hesitated, because he had not actually told her to come in and she wondered if she should ask before doing so. But, she feared having him say something like “God, you’re persistent. Just come in already.” She was very, very afraid.

She opened the door jerkily like a robot. Instead of a hospital room with six patients to the room, it was a private room. The walls, floor, and ceiling were all pure white which threw off her sense of distance, making the room seem oddly large.

The boy sat up in a pure white bed. The window next to the bed was open, and the pure white curtain fluttered slightly.

He was alive.

That truth alone almost brought tears to Index’s eyes. She was unsure if she should leap into his arms right then and there or if she should first give his head a good chomp for being so reckless.

“Um…” the boy said with a quizzical look on his face while bandages were wrapped around his head like a headband. “Did you go to the wrong room by any chance?”

The boy’s words were the polite and doubtful words of someone probing for information.

It was the voice of someone who had just received a phone call from a complete stranger.

—This was less amnesia and more a case of complete memory destruction.

The words the doctor had told Index in that freezing summer examination room floated up in the back of her mind.

—He did not just "forget" his memories. The brain cells were physically destroyed. I really don't see how he could remember those things again. Honestly, did someone open up his skull and jam a stun gun inside?

"…"

Index's breathing stopped. She could not help but lower her gaze.

Serious damage had been done to the boy's brain as a reaction to his forced overuse of his esper powers and as damage from the light Index herself had fired. (Or so she had heard. She did not remember it herself.)

Since it was physical damage —that is, just a wound— healing it might have been possible with recovery magic like with Index's sliced open back. However, that transparent boy had a right hand called Imagine Breaker. It would negate all magic whether for good or evil.

In other words, even if she tried to heal the boy, recovery magic would be negated.

It all came down to the boy's mind and heart being dead rather than his body.

"Umm?"

The boy's voice sounded unsure… no, worried.

For some reason, Index could not allow that transparent boy to speak like that. The boy was hurt for her sake. It was unfair for him to be worried for her.

Index forced down whatever it was that was gathering in her heart and then took a deep breath. She tried to smile and thought she might have managed.

The boy was transparent through and through, clearly showing that he did not remember Index at all.

“Um, are you okay? You look really sad.”

That transparent boy smashed her perfect smile to pieces all at once. Index recalled that the boy had always seemed able to see the true emotions hidden behind her smiles.

“I’m perfectly okay.” Index worked to keep her breathing steady. “Of course I’m okay.”

The transparent boy studied Index’s face for a bit.

“…Um. Did we know each other by any chance?”

That question was the hardest one for Index to bear, proving that the transparent boy knew nothing about her.

Nothing. Truly nothing.

“Yes…” replied Index as she stood in the middle of the hospital room. Her body language was similar to that of an elementary school student in a manga sent to stand out in the hall for forgetting her homework.

“Touma, you don’t remember? We met on your dorm balcony.”

“…I live in a dorm?”

“…Touma, you don’t remember? You destroyed my Walking Church with your right hand.”

“What’s a Walking Church? …Is it some kind of new jogging religion?”

“… …Touma, you don’t remember? You fought magicians for me.”

“Is Touma someone’s name?”

Index felt like she could not continue to speak for much longer.

“Touma, you don’t remember?”

Even so, she had to ask one last thing.

“Your friend, Index… loved you.”

“I’m sorry,” said the transparent boy. “And what is Index? It doesn’t sound like a person’s name. Do I have a cat or a dog?”

“Weh…” Index felt the urge to cry rise up as high as her chest, but she crushed that urge and forced it down.

She forced it down and smiled. It was hardly a perfect smile, but she did at least manage a crumbling smile.

“Just kidding! You totally fell for it! Ah ha ha ha!!”

“Hweh…?” Index froze in place.

The unsure expression left the transparent boy’s face. It was completely swapped out for a fierce and incredibly evil smile with bared canines.

“Why are you getting so emotional over being called a dog or cat, you masochist? What? Are you into things like collars or something? C’mon, I have no intention of having this end with me revealing a secret interest in kidnapping and confining little girls.”

At some point, color had filled the transparent boy.

Index did not understand why. She thought she hallucinated and rubbed her eyes. She thought she was hearing things and cleared out her ears. It felt like her perfectly sized habit had somehow become so big that one shoulder would slip off.

“Huh? Eh? Touma? Huh? I was told your brain cells had been destroyed so you forgot everything…”

“…C’mon now. Don’t make it sound like it would’ve been better if I had.” Kamijou sighed. “You really are slow. It’s true I chose to take those feathers of light at the very, very end. I’m no magician, so I have no idea what effects they had, but according to the doctor, my brain cells were damaged. As such, I was supposed to have amnesia, right?”

“You were supposed to?”

“Yup. After all, *that damage was done by magic power, right?*”

“Ah,” said Index as she realized something.

“That’s right, that’s it, and you’ve got it. Is three times enough? That makes things simple. I just touched my own head with my right hand and used Imagine Breaker on myself.”

“Ahh…” Index weakly sat down on the floor.

“Basically, I just had to negate the *magical* damage before it could reach my brain and do permanent damage there. If it were more like a physical phenomenon like Stiyl’s flames, it would never have worked, but those feathers of light were nothing more than a strange, supernatural power, so there was no problem.”

It was the same as how a bomb would not explode even if its fuse were lit as long as the fuse was cut before it reached the bomb. Before the damage running through Kamijou’s body could reach the brain, he had negated that damage itself.

It sounded ridiculous. It sounded absolutely ridiculous, but that boy’s Imagine Breaker could negate even the rules created by God.

As Index sat on the floor in a daze with her legs bent backwards to either side, she looked up at Kamijou’s face. Now she was sure, the shoulder of her absolute nun’s habit had indeed slipped down. Her expression was just as stupid looking.

“Ha ha ha. Man, you should’ve seen your face. With how you always get everyone to volunteer for your sake, I hope this incident has taught you something.”

“…” She could not respond.

“…Huh? …Um.”

Kamijou grew a bit unsure of himself and the tone of his voice dropped.

Index slowly lowered her head and her long silver bangs covered her expression. As she sat on the floor, her shoulders trembled slightly. It seemed she was gritting her teeth.

“Um, there is one thing I would like to ask. May I ask it, princess?” With an unpleasant tone in his voice, Kamijou returned to probing for information.

“What?” replied Index.

“Um… Are you angry by any chance?”

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The nurse’s call rang.

The scream of a boy who had been bitten on the top of the head rang throughout the hospital.

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Perfectly fitting in with some angry sound effects, Index left the hospital room.

“Oh?” said a voice near the entrance. The frog-faced doctor entered just as Index exited and had almost bumped into her. “I came because the nurse’s call went off, but… Oh, now this is bad.”

The boy’s upper body had slipped from the bed, and he cried while holding the top of his head with both hands.

“I’m gonna die. I’m really gonna die,” he muttered to himself with such realism that it was frightening.

The doctor glanced back towards the open door to the hallway before turning back to Kamijou.

“Should you really have done that?”

“Done what?” replied the boy.

“You don’t remember anything, do you?”

The transparent boy fell silent. The reality that God had created was not as kind and warm as what he had told that girl.

As a result of the magic that had afflicted them, the boy and girl had collapsed in the apartment and the two naming themselves magicians had brought them to the hospital. The supposed magicians had told the doctors what had transpired, and the doctors had of course not believed them. The doctors had only told the boy all of it, because they felt he had the right to know.

To him, it was like reading someone else’s diary. To him, it mattered not what someone else’s diary said about a girl he could neither picture in his head nor recognize if he saw her.

What he had told her had been nothing more than something he had made up based on what someone else’s diary had said. Even if it said that that right hand that was wrapped in bandages held a power that could destroy even the rules created by God…

He did not really believe it.

“But should I really have done that?” asked the transparent boy.

Even though it had been someone else’s diary, it had been so enjoyable… and so heartbreaking. His missing memories would never come back, but he had somehow managed to think of that as a very sad thing.

“For some reason, I didn’t want to make that girl cry. That was how I felt. I don’t know what kind of feeling it was and I’ll probably never remember, but that was how I felt all the same.” The transparent boy gave a truly colorless smile. “Doctor, why did you believe that story? I mean, being a doctor is about as far as you can get from things like magicians and magic.”

“Not necessarily.” A proud look appeared on the doctor’s frog-like face. “Hospitals and the occult have a surprisingly close relationship. …And I’m not talking about ghosts haunting hospitals. Depending on their religion, some people refuse to take blood transfusions, refuse surgery, and will sue you even

though you saved their life. For a doctor, it is best to just do what the patient says when it comes to the occult.”

The doctor smiled, though he did not know why smiled. When he saw the boy smile, he instinctively smiled back like a mirror image.

Or perhaps it was the boy that was a mirror of the doctor. That was just how hollow the boy’s smile was. It was like he could feel no sorrow.

The boy was really, truly transparent.

“I may still remember more than you think.”

The frog-faced doctor looked at the transparent boy in slight surprise.

“Your memories were ‘killed’, brain cells and all.”

What a ridiculous thing for me to say, thought the doctor.

But, he continued.

“To liken the human body to a computer, your hard disk was utterly fried. If there’s no data left in your brain, just where are these memories supposed to be?”

Somehow, the doctor felt the boy’s response would blow that ridiculous logic away.

“Isn’t that obvious?” replied the transparent boy. “In my heart.”

Afterword

Nice to meet you. This is Kamachi Kazuma.

Right about now, I’m starting to feel incredibly embarrassed about referring to myself with a penname. To people who have done things online: it’s a bit like revealing your handle to the world for the first time.

Come to think of it, this book got its start online.

The magicians in RPGs and such that can create balls of fire or revive the dead at the cost of some MP are quite convenient, because the term “magic” lets them do whatever they want. But (for the sake of argument) let’s assume magic actually existed. What kinds of people used magic throughout history? What kinds of rules exist behind the term "magic"? This all started when I typed “magician” and “actually exist” into a search engine in an attempt to answer those questions.

It came up with things like “how to control a black cat with silver vine powder” and “voodoo witch doctors used fugu poison to create zombies that had a state of apparent death”. I got interested when I realized that the workings of the occult seemed an awful lot like science.

Dengeki Bunko’s light novels treat magic like it's normal, so I thought that a novel that went deeper into the idea of magic might be a new idea.

…Really, this is a work that was more about my personal interest rather than an idea marketed to a certain type of reader (that is, I didn’t try to come up with some catchy topic). My bowed head will never be raised when in front of my editor Miki-san and my illustrator Haimura Kiyotaka-san who both stuck with me on this. I am truly thankful.

And to you readers who picked this book up, I am very grateful that you stuck

with my long, drawn-out writing style for this long.

I hope that Kamijou Touma and Index will live just a little longer in your hearts.

And I pray that I will get to make a 2nd volume.

For today, I lay down my pen.

…It’s actually still December 26, 2003.

-Kamachi Kazuma

Translator's Notes

1. ↑ Genius and disaster are both pronounced “tensai” in Japanese.
2. ↑ The word 'system' is written with the base kanji for the word 'miracle'. So the sentence literally implies that God's miracles are being negated.
3. ↑ When a Kyoto native asks if a guest wants to eat chazuke, it may really mean that the person has overstayed and is being politely asked to leave.
4. ↑ Index's magic declaration was originally revealed in the Subete Guidebook and is only included here because it is the only place in the series where it makes sense to.
5. ↑ Incorrectly referred to as Golden Dawn in older translations, S.·.M.·. is referred to many times in the series. S.·.M.·. will now be referred to as Stella Matutina from here onwards by js06's suggestion.
6. ↑ Magic Society was spoken in Japanese while the bolded words were spoken in English.
7. ↑ A reference to the Jojo's Bizarre Adventure manga series.
8. ↑ An agathion is a familiar spirit which appears only at midday in the shape of a human or an animal, or even within a talisman, bottle or magic ring.
9. ↑ "Blue-haired pierced-eared" is "Aogami Pierce" in Japanese. That sounds like a name, so it is used as if it is his name from here on out.
10. ↑ Biri Biri is Japanese onomatopoeia for an electric shock.
11. ↑ The original Japanese refers to the condition as Perfect Memorization Ability, though it is describing the same condition. While there exist many people with excellent memorization, regardless of what is said in many fictional material, to date, there have been no verified cases of an individual possessing a truly eidetic memory.
12. ↑ Due to peculiarities of the Japanese language, many of Stiyl's spells contain words which have different pronounciations to what would normally been spoken. In the following passage, what Stiyl says will be in **bold** and what would normally have been said will follow in parentheses.
13. ↑ Only notable due to the dragon imagery commonly associated with Imagine Breaker, but the Japanese word for tornado literally means "winding dragon".

14. ↑ Magic god is Majin() which could also mean demon god
15. ↑ In the original Japanese Kamijou erroneously refers to the Anti-Skill as the police in this scene.
16. ↑ A randoseru is a backpack that is commonly used by Japanese elementary schoolchildren.
17. ↑ This is a reference to Japanese candy known as Chocoballs. If you are lucky, the package will have either a gold angel or silver angel printed on it. One gold angel or five silver angels can be exchanged for a can of toys.
18. ↑ The original Japanese refers to the spell as **Ars Magna**.[a29] However, events in Volume 2 revise the names and functions of the spells.
19. ↑ When referring to original grimoires, the Japanese gives the English word “Origin” in furigana. This was changed to Original since it’s almost the same and sounds better in English.
20. ↑ Magician is pronounced majutsushi; Sorcerer is pronounced madoushi.
21. ↑ Literally translated as “God Purifying Demon Destroyer”; () is pronounced “Kamijou no Touma” but uses different kanji than Touma’s name (). The current translation has been suggested by js06.
22. ↑ Nanasen means “Seven Flashes”.
23. ↑ Shichiten Shichitou means “Seven Heavens Seven Swords”.
24. ↑ An iai strike is a technique that involves drawing the sword out of its sheath, striking with the sword and then resheathing it.
25. ↑ Yuisen means "Sole Flash".
26. ↑ Just like in the prologue, this is playing off the fact that “genius” and “disaster” are both pronounced the same in Japanese.
27. ↑ As mentioned in an earlier note, there have been no verified cases of an individual possesssing a truly eidetic memory.
28. ↑ The spell takes its name from one of Jesus' last sayings as he was crucified on the Cross of Golgotha.

Alternate Translations

1. ↑ **Kanji:** Person with Superpowers
2. ↑ **Kanji:** Person without Powers
3. ↑ **Kanji:** Timetable

4. ↑ **Kanji:** Super Electromagnetic Cannon
5. ↑ **Kanji:** Archive
6. ↑ **Kanji:** Illusion Destroyer
7. ↑ **Latin:** Dedicated
8. ↑ **Kanji:** Security Officer
9. ↑ **Kanji:** Public Morals Committee Member
10. ↑ **Furigana:** Rosenkreuz; **Kanji:** Rosy Cross
11. ↑ **Kanji:** Golden Dawn
12. ↑ **Kanji:** Ignition Ability
13. ↑ **Kanji:** See Through Ability
14. ↑ **Kanji:** Unreality
15. ↑ **Kanji:** Physical Examination
16. ↑ **Kanji:** Lesser Key of Solomon
17. ↑ **Kanji:** Book of Nameless Rituals
18. ↑ **Kanji:** Cannibalism Ritual Book
19. ↑ **Kanji:** Book of Necromancy
20. ↑ **Kanji:** God Killing Spear
21. ↑ **Kanji:** Familiar
22. ↑ **Kanji+Latin:** Index of Prohibited Books
23. ↑ **Furigana:** Arsenal
24. ↑ **Kanji:** Flower Fortress
25. ↑ **Kanji:** King of the Witch Hunters; **Latin:** Innocent
26. ↑ **Kanji:** Church of Necessary Evils; **Latin:** Necessary
27. ↑ **Kanji:** Vampire Killing Crimson Cross
28. ↑ **Kanji:** Automatic Secretary
29. ↑ **Kanji:** Pure Gold Conversion
30. ↑ **Kanji:** Cross of Golgotha
31. ↑ **Kanji:** Roman Orthodox Church
32. ↑ **Kanji:** Russian Established Church
33. ↑ **Kanji:** British Purtian Church
34. ↑ **Kanji:** Inquisition Officer
35. ↑ **Kanji:** Mind Reading Ability
36. ↑ **Kanji:** Brainwashing Ability
37. ↑ **Kanji:** Memory Manipulation
38. ↑ **Kanji:** Person with Strong Powers
39. ↑ **Kanji:** Mind Induction
40. ↑ **Kanji:** Thought User
41. ↑ **Kanji:** Killing Breath of the Dragon King
42. ↑ **Latin:** Save

43. ↑ **Kanji+Aramaic:** My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Toaru Majutsu no Index — Volume 01

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